



AVONDALE

OF

AVONDALE

A POLITICAL ROMANCE.

IN THREE VOLS.

BY

UTTERE BARRE.

I have a lever, had I fulcrum too,
The earth from dullest sloth should be uplift.

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To E. MARJORIBANKS, ESQ., OF 134, PICCADILLY, W.

MY DEAR MARJORIBANKS,

You have been kind enough to read the MS of the following pages, and to express a favourable opinion upon their contents. The book was written, almost entirely, nearly ten years ago, when some of the scenes and events to which it relates were in progress. For various reasons it has lain by. It is now published as it was when written, with scarcely a sentence altered ; and I trust that the verdict you have passed upon it may not be reversed or qualified by the larger audience to which it is submitted.

Believe me,

Yours very truly,

UTTERE BARRE.

LONDON,

1st May, 1877.



BOOK I.



WALTER AVONDALE.

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CHAPTER I.

It was the midst of the season, of a season gayer even than London had known for some years. On all sides nought but tokens of wealth and prosperity met the eye. The metropolis was filled with visitors from home and abroad. Splendid equipages crowded the Park, fashionable mobs nightly flocked to reception, ball, and concert, theatre and opera were packed to overflowing. True enough a close observer might have detected blemishes beneath the fair exterior. Of the wealth so ostentatiously displayed not a little came from speculations, nearer akin to gambling or downright fraud than to honest trading. Many branches of employment were in a depressed state, and even in those where work was plentiful there existed the feud, scarcely concealed, which modern legislation keeps alive between employer

and employed, each anxious to grasp the whole profit. And far down in the social strata tossed and seethed that mass of suffering and vice, born of man's selfishness and crimes, which is never absent from a great city, and which, now and again, even in law-abiding, religious England, made its cries of misery, want, and despair heard above the roar of pleasures. But what of that? Wretchedness and care are incidental to humanity, at least to its lower sections. Need those placed by fate above the reach of such mishaps allow useless regrets to embitter their cup of life? Need the sybarite, who has erected his dwelling amid the elms and olives that cluster round the flanks of Vesuvius, and overlooking the Circean bay, trouble himself about the eruption that may not happen in his time?

More than anything else a lively session added an unusual excitement to London life. Death had removed a long-tried statesman from the head of affairs, and the sceptre he had wielded with consummate tact had fallen into younger and rasher hands. Such an event, at all times, is productive of great agitation, and especially so was it now. Phaeton was endeavouring to guide

his father's chariot, but with little success. The steeds were pulling each in a different direction, and mankind were watching their efforts with feelings compounded of contempt and fear, some dreading, more hoping for, all expecting a general catastrophe.

Granstone Street is one of the quietest of those opening into Piccadilly. Here, in chambers, dwelt Walter Avondale, a member of the Inner Temple, with aspirations, however, tending to politics, rather than law. He was a very passable specimen of the average Englishman, about twenty-five, tall, well-made, with the Saxon's blue eye, and the Briton's reddish moustache and whiskers. His face told you that he was an honest man, his finely cut lips that he was a determined one, while his square, high forehead augured well for his abilities and intellect. Just at present something had ruffled his temper, and his countenance wore an expression of both vexation and constitutional melancholy, which occasionally seized him. A slight knock at the door roused him from his meditations.

"Confound it!" was his ejaculation. "Talbot, I suppose, wants to trot me off to the Adelphi to

see the new actress he is in love with—unless it is Tom Lewis, with a cool request for another fiver.”

The appearance of his visitor agreeably dissipated his doubts, and he gladly welcomed him—

“Jardine, my dear fellow, how are you? I thought your people had a grand affair on to-night, and when I heard you outside I fully expected some other less delightful acquaintance.”

“Well, so I believe my mother has, or is to have, a crush this evening. I don’t suppose they have begun to come yet. I must be back there presently; but I heard something at dinner just now which I thought would interest yourself, and I have dropped in to let you know it.”

“Me! What is it? A police magistracy at the diggings, or a consulship in Mexico? Both which, as my head is not proof against lead, nor my intercostal integuments against a well-sharpened poignard, I must respectfully decline.”

“No, nothing of the sort, Avondale. You are too valuable to your friends to be despatched on such an expedition. The fact is, my father has been offered, or partly offered, the Vice-Presidency

of the Colonial Board. You know all about his experience in that line. The Government is rather shaky." ("Very much so," interpolated his listener). "Very much so—in fact, there is an ominous split in it. Wharfedale, Chief Commissioner of the Poor Law Board, and Maitland, of the Home Office, do not agree particularly well. The latter is, as you are aware, the actual head of the Ministry, and, if it comes to a crisis, the Marquis must simply go out into the cold. He is at best but a dummy, his subs do all the work. Magnus Jupiter kept him there out of personal regard, and now that his kingship has gone back to Olympus, Wharfedale has been considerably snubbed. He considers himself, too, quite as important an individual as the Premier. It, therefore, seems very probable that before the end of the week he will resign. His retirement may carry others with him, though I think not—save his own particular following—but, anyhow, Sir George Edmunds is to change from the Emigrants to the Workhouses."

"Edmunds to go to the Poor Law Board! What next, my dear fellow? He is the solitary Liberal who knows anything of the Colonies."

“So it may be, but that, at least, is the present proposal, and, if it be carried out, the Vice-President is to become head of his department, and my father to take the place thereby left vacant.”

“Well narrated, Jardine. I did not think you were such a politician, though it strikes me that you have left out some very important considerations. Why don’t you get a seat somewhere?”

“I? Not while I can run up a good score at Lord’s. But where was I? At the offer made to the governor—this is just the point which has brought me here. If this arrangement is carried out, what say you to being the new Vice-President’s Private Secretary? I believe such an individual is a necessary part of the establishment; and I am sure my father is not acquainted with any one whom he would appoint in preference to yourself. Probably such a post won’t satisfy the cravings of your ambitious mind, but don’t refuse it straight off. It would, at least, give you what you especially desire—an introduction to politics—as well as a species of inchoative claim to something higher in future.”

“I scarcely know what to reply. It is an opening such as I have not ventured to hope for, at least, not for some time. I am extremely obliged to you, Stuart, personally, for your consideration and kindness.”

“Never mind about that. If you will accept the offer, it is all the thanks I ever desire. But I don’t believe you will long be content with a private secretaryship. Give you an inch, I have no doubt you will soon take an ell.”

“Not unlikely, supposing I should see the opportunity for taking the ell; and this opportunity might, in the present state of affairs, easily occur at any moment. We seem on the point of a general smash up, when all sections will become involved in one inextricable muddle, and leaders without followers, parties without chief, will go wandering about purposeless.”

“It looks very like it, as far as one can judge, who reads only the sporting news and keeps clear of parliamentary dinners. I dare say you not unseldom catch yourself thinking that, from the midst of this medley, you might contrive to pull yourself to the fore?”

“A very natural thought, too, Stuart. But

about this offer—is it at all probable that Mr. Jardine will close with it ?”

“In truth, I scarcely think it is. He and Maitland are not on the best terms. However, you now know quite as much about it as I do—that the offer has been made—and very probably you know the governor’s private sentiments much better than I do. Anyhow, if you don’t, you can find them out to-morrow evening. They have been complaining, my mother and my sisters I mean, that you have not put in an appearance for a week or more ; and said I was to bring you to-night. You have an invitation, but have refused. Can’t you come ?”

“No thanks ; don’t feel up for company.”

“What is the matter ? You were looking rather glum when I came in. Not got anything on that roarer, Star of Dawn, I hope. She has gone down nicely in the betting the last few days, and the race comes off in a fortnight.”

“Merely a few shillings, and those I went at the solicitation of Tom Lewis, who, poor beggar, has all his earthly wealth, a £10 note, invested on the mare. It was a fit of the blues, I suppose. I have been seeing how the vessel of State is drift-

ing aimlessly a prey to winds and waves, and what miserable little men it is who are pretending to guide her, and I have felt like a caged eagle ; but your information has put me all right, for if Wharfedale goes out, there will be a split in the Cabinet, and then, with Mr. Jardine's assistance, who can tell what opening may be afforded one ?”

“You have much confidence in yourself, and more, you often say, in your luck. I am sure I wish you all success. But I rather fancy you are too impatient. Your ostensible career is the Bar, your private inclination is to politics. Yet, even there, you are not content to pace the toilsome road, but wish to rush into sudden notoriety. Have you been trying any of your old friends, the editors, lately ?”

“Only once or twice, besides that article which you saw in last Saturday's ‘ Weekly.’ ”

“That was a very good one. I have heard several speaking of it. But don't waste time in getting up a reputation as a journalist. Besides, you are not fitted for that line—you are intended for Nisi Prius rather than Chambers ; for a visible, rather than an invisible king of men.”

“Thanks, Stuart; I ought to rise and bow. I, too, begin to think that at the Press, as in every other line of life, to obtain a reputation one must be blessed with the luck which Providence seems to have taken from my family, or the special connections ‘in the trade’ which I certainly do not possess.”

“Probably so, my friend. Don’t, however, run down the newspapers. Nobody knows you yet, and not unlikely your articles are not quite the stuff that suits the populus. Besides, that is at best a slow method of reaching celebrity. Better try a three volume novel, or a sensational drama, or, better still, stick to the law.”

“No, I can’t keep to Coke and Blackstone—it’s impossible. Cestus que trusts, and trespass qr. cl. fr., contingent remainders and bottomry bonds are continually getting into confusion worse confounded in my brain. Your proposal seems to solve the difficulty. I have not money or influence enough to get into Parliament unaided; and affairs just now offer a capital opening for one. I have great doubts, however, whether joining the present Government would not be embarking in a sinking boat. Maitland

is certainly the real head; and if Wharfedale goes, I imagine the Premier and the more moderate men will go with him."

"Perhaps so. The governor decidedly is not a Rad; and if it comes to a choice between that flag and the Tories, I know which he will choose. But do not omit to come to dinner with us to-morrow—no one will be there—and then we can talk it over quietly."

"Thanks, I will. Seven o'clock?"

"Yes, that to half-past. But, dear me, what a time I have been. Excuse my running away. They will be wondering what has become of me."

"Don't trouble about it, though I am sorry you are obliged to be off. Good evening."

CHAPTER II.

WALTER AVONDALE came of a family situate for many centuries—indeed, from a period lost in the mists of the times anterior to the Conquest—in the vale of the Avon in Lyddonshire. A beautiful region is that which had been the home of his ancestors ; now a valley whose width may be measured by yards, shut in by low ridges scarcely worthy the name of hills, then the vale disappearing by insensible gradations into a broad plain ; valley and plain thickly timbered, and supplying rich pasture for herds of cattle. Through the midst runs a small stream, the Avon—the “water” *par excellence* of Lyddonshire—from which the district gets its own name, Avondale, a name adopted by its owners, though little but the name remains to them now.

Where the valley is narrowest, and the ridges the steepest, at the junction of the Avon with

another but smaller stream, is placed the Hall—A'nd'le Hall, as it is commonly known to the country people round. It is a low and straggling, but very roomy building; one of those edifices which were erected in the middle ages, and kept in repair by subsequent occupiers for their own comfort, and not to please the æsthetic notions of future times.

The Avondales, centuries ago, had possessed, not only the whole of Avondale, but a large portion of Lyddonshire besides. Gradually, however, their large possessions had departed from them. They were not courtiers, yet they were so ill-advised as always to fight for their God and their King—they would not be traders, yet they could not live on their lands as yeomen—so they lost, and what they lost they did not recover. Bit by bit the greater part had gone, some as a punishment for loyalty, the rest as a punishment for honesty, till now there remained to them as many acres as their forefathers had square miles.

Walter Avondale's father was a self-contained, moody, some said a sour-tempered man. His thoughts turned too much to the past, and he

had an utter contempt for the many successful traders who, attracted by the beauty of Lyddonshire, had settled around him.

His wife had died early and left him with two infant children, Walter and Edith. These he loved as only a man of strong mind, whose feelings have ever been repressed, can love. Walter had received an excellent education, physically and mentally, and not in mere book learning, but in whatever might best fit him for work in life. At home his father had indoctrinated him with his own love of and skill in manly exercises, and Shrewsbury's head-master had taken equal pains to instil into him an appreciation of the writers of antiquity. He had won a scholarship; and taken a good degree, both in the classical tripos and well up amongst the wranglers, at Trinity, Cambridge; and he was now trying to study law.

Edith was of the most perfect type of English womanhood. She was about six years younger than her brother, whom she much resembled, rather above the average height, and having a faultless form. Her bright blue eyes and delicate cheeks told of her country life. Her fair

flaxen hair hung in masses, but seldom seen in these degenerate days. She was a splendid horse-woman, a good linguist, and a skilful musician.

On Walter and Edith Mr. Avondale had lavished all his care, but even towards them he not unseldom seemed stern and repelling. His peculiar idiosyncrasy can, however, easily be accounted for. Not a room in Avondale Hall but contains a memento of a time when his family took high rank amongst the magnates of his country. Here is a trophy brought back from the Holy Land in the third Crusade, there is a helmet battered and dented at Créci. In the entrance hall stand the suit of armour in which an ancestor died at Barnet, and a pile of cannon balls that Fairfax left as a parting gift. In the library are portraits of many a well-known warrior of his blood. Avondale Church, close by, contains six effigies of his most gallant forefathers.

And now all is passed away, and he is reduced to the position of a third-rate country squire. Such was, or rather such is, Mr. Avondale. Far better, doubtless, would it have been had he

striven to restore his family to their pristine glory, but his entry into life having been darkened and obscured by his father's excesses, and having been too proud to ask for assistance where it was not voluntarily offered, he has contented himself with sinking most of the feelings implanted in us by nature, in thorough contempt for humanity generally.

Of his neighbours may be particularised Mr. Dawson, a successful merchant who, from small beginnings, had amassed a large fortune. He came from Newbury, the chief town of Lyddonshire, a few miles from Avondale. There he returned with his wealth, bought a small property in the county, and built, not far from Avondale Hall, a big, red-bricked mansion. He had one child only, a daughter. He had also brought up a brother's son, who was now a captain in the army.

Mr. Avondale despised him as being a *parvenu*—he disliked Avondale for being what he was not, a gentleman.

CHAPTER III.

MR. CHARLES McLEOD JARDINE, Vice-President in prospective of the Colonial Board, was one of those beings whom the fates delight to favour. An offshoot of an ancient but reduced Highland family, he had gone to Australia in early youth, with a light pocket and his father's blessing, to seek his fortune. • He arrived there at the time when land *ad libitum* was bestowed on every applicant. It was truly then the "Squatter's Paradise." Some of these men possessed runs exceeding half-a-million acres, and supporting sheep numbered by hundreds of thousands. Amongst them Mr. Jardine, in a few years, became pre-eminent. Ample success attended all his undertakings, and, while yet a young man, he had amassed wealth more than sufficient to purchase the fee simple of many an English barony. The Gold Fever trebled his riches. He owned a considerable area around Melbourne, and, when

that place sprang in 1852 from an unimportant seaport to be the foremost city in the southern hemisphere, the value of some of that land increased a hundredfold.

From sheep-farming he turned to politics, and obtained a seat in the Victorian Legislature. His career here eclipsed in brilliancy his previous efforts. Eight years was he a member of that august body, during which period he underwent six general elections, and saw fifteen changes of Ministry, in ten of which he was included, being three times Premier, once Postmaster-General, twice Speaker, and twice Commissioner of Crown Lands.

After such a training, returning to England, he speedily entered Parliament as one of the representatives for Radford. In St. Stephen's he did not figure very conspicuously. His experience in Australia had not influenced him in favour of Republicanism, though neither had it converted him into a Tory.

He thus trimmed between the two great parties who rule the State. The one disliked him as not being, contrary to all legitimate reasoning, a thorough-going demagogue; the other, doubtful

that "anything good could come out of Galilee," considered that the man who had such a political training must necessarily be a confirmed foe to all existing institutions. His speeches always carried great weight, especially in matters concerning the colonies; he was admitted, on all hands, to be a most valuable supporter; but, from not having distinctly joined either party, he had not yet filled any office. The late Premier, Lord Liffey, too, and himself had not been on especially good terms.

Lord Liffey had been, in many respects, a remarkable man. He was an Irish peer, the last of his line, and had sat in the House from early youth, and been a member of not a few Ministries. His training was, therefore, of such a kind, and so lengthened, as necessarily to make him acquainted with most of the stock maxims of government, and with some of the principles in accordance with which the affairs of a country possessing a representative chamber may most skilfully be controlled. But he never became a statesman—he educated himself into a politician, and as such died, without attaining to, and, perhaps, without having been ambitious of, higher

distinction. He ever showed himself averse to real work ; he was very content to let things glide on in even course ; he avoided as far as practicable any interference with the institutions—social, legal, municipal—of the nation ; he hated unnecessary legislation. A Liberal in name, he was a Tory in all else, in inclination, in thought, in action. He never looked far into the future ; he made no attempt to provide for the possible contingencies of the hereafter, or for the possible requirements of coming generations ; he troubled nought about the ideal goal towards which the human race may be tending ; but, on the other hand, he was neither theorist nor schemer, neither philosopher nor bigot, and if he failed to comprehend the real position and the duties of the first Minister of a mighty empire—if, from narrowness of intellect or innate timidity, he proposed no means to redress the suffering and injustice which were rank, even in the country he ruled—he at least did his best to preserve order at home, and to secure respect abroad, and in this it cannot be said that he did not to some extent succeed. Above all, he was a thorough Englishman, and had an almost intuitive know-

ledge of the peculiarities and idiosyncracies of his fellow-subjects. His tact, too, was wonderful, his suavity of manners scarcely less remarkable, and, by dint of these qualities, he had won and long retained over the Lower House an influence such as few other statesmen had ever possessed. So thorough was his sway that he was oftener mentioned by the sobriquet of *Magnus Jupiter* than by his real name.

On his death the Earl of Garmouth, Secretary for Foreign Affairs, succeeded to his station. Garmouth, like *Magnus Jupiter*, had spent over half a century in Parliament, the greater portion of this period in the Commons. He was a man of little capacity and less invention, but what he lacked in these respects he more than made up in conceit and bad temper. He had supported most of the chief measures brought in by his party—most, not all, for on more than one occasion he had thrown himself into the arms of the Tories—and had assisted greatly to secure the success of several. But this was all. Not one important measure had he originated, not one comprehensive enactment was due to his unaided judgment. He was short in stature, and, like

all short men, he was a fussy meddler, never satisfied save when making a noise, and fancying he was performing some grand exploit. He bore just the same relation to the great legislators he was associated with that the stone-collector bears to the geologist who is deciphering the history of former creations—that the laboratory assistant bears to the physicist who is slowly unravelling the mysteries of nature. He was ever in a muddle, ever getting his particular department into hot water; and then he would loudly proclaim that the fault lay with his colleagues, not with himself. He and Magnus Jupiter had, in their younger days, been sworn foes; had in turn, when in opposition, worked the downfall of the Cabinet in which the other was a leading member; and even, when some years previously they had in their old age arranged their differences, neither would serve under the other in the Lower House, and he had, consequently, been relegated to an Earldom and comparative oblivion. We have said that on the late Premier's death the Earl succeeded to his post—he did not succeed to his tact or influence.

Indeed, the now Premier was only nominally

at the head of affairs, the real chief being the leader in the Lower House, Arthur Stuart Maitland, Secretary of State for the Home Department. Maitland's many-sided character will ever afford an interesting study to the moralist and psychologist. He was in some respects fitted, but in still more totally unfitted, for his position. An excellent scholar, a skilful financier, an experienced administrator, a fluent debater, a persuasive speaker—these were great points in his favour. But they were more than compensated by weaknesses almost infantine. He had little coolness, less tact, still less command of temper. He was thoroughly ambitious, greedy of power, passionately fond of distinction. He could not endure a rival, much less a superior, on his own side ; while the successes of opponents roused his bitterest hostility. His mind wanted balance ; he took but one view of a question, and that not unseldom the wrong one ; he was hasty as a child, illogical as a woman, ever jumping at conclusions, ever taking up positions from which retreat was impossible ; above all, his morbid craving for notoriety rendered him fickle and changeable, and not only had it turned him from

the Tories, who in youth sent him into Parliament, to the Liberals, whom he now controlled, but it also seemed on the point of converting him into a Radical. Such was Maitland, and with faults like these how could even his great gifts be other than a curse to himself, and a danger to his country? No wonder sage men looked on him with feelings very near akin to dread. He must shortly, very shortly, fill the highest post in the Government—to what lengths might not his headstrong passions urge him? How would he steer the vessel of the State through the many dangers that lowered thick around her, even in the near future? No wonder that between him and his less excitable colleagues little goodwill existed.

The Marquis of Wharfedale was the first with whom he openly quarrelled. The Marquis was the representative of a class. He possessed considerable estates in each of the three kingdoms; he came of an old family; his parliamentary experience was considerable, first in the House of Commons as member for his pocket-borough of Dacre; he had a good knowledge of the world; his manners were courtly, his bearing dignified,

though somewhat haughty, his taste highly cultivated. He had a needless contempt for trade and commerce, and as Maitland came from a race of merchants, this did not mend matters between them.

But other members of the Ministry could not brook the Home Secretary's overbearance. Sir Henry Kerr, President of the India Council, was one of these. His father, Malcolm Kerr, had been one of those Indian worthies of the olden sort, who, by brain and arm, built up the British Empire in the East, and he himself during the three years that he had filled his present office had greatly contributed to the material advancement of that empire. Railways ran across the Ganges and the Godavery, by Agra and Hyderabad, and along the base of the Himalayas; the telegraph connected every town of importance with the three capitals; irrigation works had been completed, or at least commenced wherever practicable; the destruction of the forests was stopped; and the annual expenditure confined itself within the current revenue. But there was every probability that his public utility would be sacrificed to private animosity.

Mr. Herbert Williams was another who objected to Maitland's views. At the urgent request of the late Premier, Mr. Williams had undertaken the post instituted by Lord Liffey, and perhaps the solitary instance of his lordship's innovations, of Minister of Education. Some years previously he had been, for a short period, Under Secretary for the Home Department, and in that office had gained much insight into the most pressing social wants, home and foreign. He had since acquired a thorough knowledge of the educational systems of the Continent, and this experience, added to his own innate talent, skill, and energy, had hitherto enabled him to discharge to the general satisfaction the very responsible duties of his present department, duties trying in themselves, and rendered doubly so by the necessity of making all arrangements without assistance from predecessors. It should not be forgotten that the peculiar difficulties of his task were, if possible, enhanced by the fact that he was a Nonconformist. He had, however, conciliated the Church without losing the esteem of his coreligionists, and, under his supervision, was

rapidly being laid the basis of that system of primary education which has done so much for the welfare, moral, mental, physical, of the present generation. But he hated humbug, he possessed ability, and he would not pander to popular prejudices, even to save his seat in the House.

The then Parliament had been summoned under the auspices of the late Premier, and his adherents in it greatly outnumbered the Tories. But these adherents were many of them Liberal in name, rather than in reality. They were perfectly willing and ready to entrust their great chief with the guidance and control of everything. In fact, they rather liked the arrangement. It saved them the bother of personally examining into and cogitating upon the merits of measures brought under their notice. It prevented the raising of angry debates upon excitable questions.

Under Magnus Jupiter the House became the pleasantest club in town. There members made their appointments and met their acquaintances. The evenings were passed in friendly chat; disagreeable topics were quietly tabooed; irre-

pressible reformers lost their zeal, and impassioned orators toned down their flaming eloquence; no man spoke harshly of his neighbour, or employed sarcasm against a foe; corruption and extravagance had passed from the land, for none ever alluded to such vices.

“A holy calm upon the building fell,
No hostile tones jarred through it night or day,
And all went merry as a marriage-bell,
Till Magnus Jupiter was called away.”

And even then not at first did a change occur. But the cunning hand and the clear head were gone, and those who had observed all the directions of the deceased Premier were not inclined to pay a similar submission to those of the Earl of Garmouth. One session had the Earl held his position, another was now half over, but discontent and disturbance were rife. Maitland was burning to take the reins, and the Radicals, whose doctrines, while Magnus Jupiter survived, had been rather under a cloud, were scheming to secure the promulgation of their peculiar tenets, and were desirous of supporting Maitland against the aristocratic part of his Cabinet.

On the other hand, many of the Liberals,

the Whig Liberals of the old school, inclined far more towards Toryism than Radicalism; but they were timid, dubious, undecided. They hesitated to ally themselves with the Tories, they had no definite principles of their own, they had no leader. It was to these and their peculiar position that Avondale's thoughts had often turned; and now the impending changes in the Cabinet, and the split that must be thereby occasioned, however much it might be concealed and smoothed over, throughout the Liberal party, were fanning into full flame the dangerous spark of ambition that had ever lain glowing in his breast.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. JARDINE'S dinner must be denominated quiet. The party included, besides his own family and three or four fashionable nobodies, Mr. William FitzHenry and the Hon. E. Mordaunt Tracy; both men in the prime of life.

The former, a highly successful advocate and a fair lawyer and a Q.C., sat in the House as member for King's Langton. A brilliant speaker and a useful debater, he was a most useful adherent to any cause, but he had not yet definitely allied himself to either party.

The latter, a scion of the ducal house of Lincoln, a genuine Whig, with connections extending through a dozen families and influencing a score of elections, was a man of mark, and he possessed shrewdness, tact, and ability amply sufficient to enable him fully to utilise his advantages of rank and connections.

Dinner over and the ladies withdrawn, politics naturally became the subject of conversation.

“What do you think of the Government just at present, Tracy?” asked FitzHenry.

“Rather so so; but it is difficult to have any fixed opinion. Ask our host. He ought to know—he has been offered a post.”

“Not exactly; in fact, not at all. I have had a species of communication, but I am not certain whether it is from the Earl or Maitland.”

“The Earl, I imagine; you are not pronounced enough for the other.”

“Is it true,” queried the Q.C., “that Wharfedale has determined to resign?”

“I am not certain,” replied Tracy, “but if so—and I think it is very likely—there will be a thorough revolution in the Ministry. The Premier will give up on the plea of old age, and half the Cabinet will follow him—on no plea but that of dislike to the new leader.”

“And their places will be filled with Republicans—not much less than a political earthquake, that. By the by, Avondale, you should get a seat now. There is every chance for a young man of ability, and your name would ensure you a hearing.”

“I have been thinking of it very much lately, but scarcely see my way clear. Power, however, seems to be falling more and more into the hands of mere adventurers, and I do not think I could enrol myself under that banner.”

“Yes,” said Tracy, “you certainly should do so. I have often heard the governor speak of your grandfather. His doings were the talk of the town. He was famed for wildness (‘unfortunately much too wild for us’) at a time when dissipation was a virtue; but he was not without influence in Parliament. Have you ever heard the story about his not being able to find the Speaker? He and Vrynné were coming into the House one evening, when, after trying for two or three minutes to make out who were present, he said—

“‘Vrynné, where is the Speaker? I can’t see any one in the chair.’

“Can’t you?” answered his companion. “‘I can see two!’

“But, talking of chances, who is to be the next Solicitor-General; eh, FitzHenry? If these changes take place, Brentford will hardly remain

Chancellor, and I suppose Sir Edward Pilgrim would take his place."

"No, Pilgrim won't accept office with the Radicals. Maitland will have to replace Eastbourne—and that splendid lawyer's private character is too much blown upon to admit of the experiment—or must raise one of the Lords Justices or the Chief Baron. As for my own part, I think I should hesitate before committing myself to such an advanced party."

"I think you would do wisely. You have a splendid practice, which I imagine would be lessened by your becoming one of the Crown law officers. And there is no disguising the fact that the present disruption is owing to Maitland's temper and ambition, nor is there any guarantee that his tact in future will be sufficient to control his heterogeneous following. What say you, Jardine?"

"Time will tell. England is not fitted for a Republic; and if it were, the hour is not yet come, nor is Maitland the man."

"No," laughed FitzHenry; "nor, I suppose, you would add, her Colonies either. How many

times, my dear sir, were you ejected from offices during your half-a-dozen years of Parliamentary life at Melbourne?"

"About ten, I believe; but it was generally the fault of the Attorney-General. The lawyers there are most unmanageable; and once I thought of dispensing altogether with a legal adviser, and trying myself to supply his place."

"An interesting community it must be. Better send Master Stuart out there for a year or two before inducting him into the more sedate life in Downing Street."

"Don't plume yourselves on your own urbanity and politeness, Mr. FitzHenry. I might get into worse habits by beginning my career at home. It was only the other day that the honourable member for—I forget the place—wishing to make a particularly smart reply to an observation of Reuben Hardhead's, said, 'He thanked God his borough was not represented by a buffoon.' I have read, *Ex uno disce omnes*."

"Don't be quite so hard on us, my young friend. That was two years ago; Hardhead, unfortunately for the House's amusement, lost his seat at the

last election. Who besides Brentford will follow the Premier, Tracy?"

"Kerr, perhaps; Williams undoubtedly."

"But why allow Maitland to have it all his own way?" put in Avondale. "Why not reverse matters? These seceders are amongst our most prominent statesmen; their overbearing colleague is a new man; is it a fact that their supporters are less numerous than his?"

"They may not be less in number, but they have no distinct leader. The Liberal party is thoroughly broken up, and Maitland, being at the head of the only compact section of it, is, for the present, master of the situation. He will keep his position just as long as he maintains his vantage-ground. If his opponents would once unite, his rule would come to an end, but I do not see who is to be the chief—there is no one with pre-eminent influence. Garmouth is past his time; Kerr is just the reverse, too young; and Jardine here is not sufficiently known. There is Wyre, a Liberal at heart, who would be just the man, but for his connections. As it is, the choice is between Maitland and the Tories."

"Pity," said Jardine, "a coalition could not

be brought about between the moderate men on both sides."

"Yes, but these are dreadfully afraid of each other."

"Meanwhile," added Avondale, "the country is to be started on the road to revolution."

"Well, gentlemen," interrupted the host, "had we not better join the ladies?"

They adjourned to the drawing-room. Avondale received an invitation to accompany Mr. Jardine to a fête, a few days later, at the Horticultural Gardens. Most of the company withdrew, but, before Avondale left, he and his host had a few minutes' conversation.

"Stuart tells me he mentioned to you the proposition that has been partly made to me. What is your opinion of it?"

"I should very much like to become your private secretary, if it were carried out; but, from what was stated just now, one would doubt it. Besides, my dear sir, could not you demand a seat in the Cabinet; not merely a vice-presidency?"

"Yes, I think so. Of course, I have not in the least closed with the proposal. And, as you

say, it is very questionable how long it will remain open. Every hour the position of the Ministry becomes more delicate. They will not, perhaps, be defeated on their intended reduction of duties, but the third reading will be carried by so small a majority that a crisis will occur. Either the whole Ministry will resign, or the Premier only, being succeeded by Maitland, in the hope that the change may infuse new life into the party. If this happens, the reduction will, doubtless, be abandoned, and a complete measure of taxation will be introduced next year. The new-formed Ministry I shall not join; it will not hold together long, though it is not very manifest who will succeed them."

"That is what I cannot understand. Maitland is an upstart, a good debater and financier perhaps, but—so those who know him, yourself, for instance, assert—without the capacity either to moderate his own temper or to control his associates."

"Yes, Avondale, that is the case, but, as Tracy reminded us just now, he has the advantage. The influence of the nobility has been very much lessened during the last quarter of a

century; one or two of its members have associated themselves with the Radicals; and, consequently, they are all afraid of each other. This divided authority rightly belongs to the middle-class, but this section of the community never does clearly comprehend its own importance. Occupied with the one idea of getting money, they concern themselves about nothing else, interfering as little in the affairs of Government as if these were matters entirely beyond their province. The lowest orders, however, are never without their stump orators, restless demagogues who exist by their ravings, and who keep their listeners in a constant state of agitation. Thus it happens that we are ever hearing of the demands and wishes, and power and strength of the unwashed populace; and thus it happens also that what the aristocracy has lost appears to have been transferred in all its entirety to the mob."

"But this is just what I cannot understand. At the beginning of this century the nobility were all-powerful, or, at least, they in conjunction with the better portion of the middle-class. Now it looks as if we all intended to prostrate ourselves before the majesty of King Mob."

“The spirit of the age, Walter.”

“Rather the weakness and timidity and irresolution of men in your own position, sir. Here is Maitland, a Radical now, whatever he was twenty years ago, arrogating to himself the premiership in a House elected under the auspices of Magnus Jupiter. You are all playing into his hands; you stand aside while he struts forward. His personal friends are, at most, a dozen; the Liberals, who believe in him, are, say, twice as many, the less rampant of the Rads about the same number, add to these the waifs and strays, perhaps thirty, who float about in the political atmosphere, light as feathers, being unweighted with brains or principles—and you get a motley crew of seventy to ninety. You allow these to control full three hundred of your own associates, and to paralyse all your efforts.”

“Well, so it is; but what is to be done? Maitland’s party may be small in ability, and in numbers, but they are organised, and he has a great advantage over his opponents from being first in the field, and in possession of the Government stronghold.”

“From which you ought to oust him. He is

avowedly a poor tactician ; it would require no very skilful general to bring him to grief. And why need the moderate Liberals be any longer disorganised ?”

“ Because they have no one with brains enough to whip them up together. You had better undertake that duty, Avondale. Tracy gave you a piece of advice just now—‘ get into Parliament.’ I will add to it—get some prominent Peer to put himself at the head of the Liberals,—he would soon gather round his banner a goodly muster.”

“ More easily said than done, sir. Excuse my asking one question. I see you are anxious to be attending to your guests. Do you think Tracy, just now, was speaking his inmost opinions when he was inveighing against Maitland ?”

“ Can’t say ; but, whether he was or not, undoubtedly if Maitland offered him a post he would take it.”

“ And such an offer might easily be made, if only to secure the support of the Lincoln family ?”

“ Yes.”

CHAPTER V.

OH, ambition! the incentive of every noble soul. What were life without thee but the mere existence of a brute—a succession of night and day, summer and winter—a constant round of petty employments, and still more petty desires—so many years, more or less, of eating, drinking, sleeping, moiling—and then the end, the disappearance once and for ever from the world's record? Under many a form thou appearest, in many a hidden scene thine influence is manifest. The patriot's love for his fatherland, the statesman's craving for honour, the soldier's hunger for renown, the student's thirst for knowledge—all alike are originated by thee. What robs the stake and the scaffold of their terrors, what nerves the traveller, wandering faint and perishing over untrodden wilds; what supports the philosopher under the unreasoning sneers of inane foplings—what, but the trust in the here-

after? Oh fame, my guiding star, eagerly have I followed thy rays. Cold and deceptive are they to the timorous and unstable, but full of strength to the determined and patient. Clear and direct is the route they point out, but surrounded by precipices, causing destruction to wanderers from the way. Long and difficult is the ascent to thy mansion—slowly, carefully, hopefully am I climbing it. Aid me to accomplish it.

Vast is the change that occurs in the mind of a young man when first there is aroused in him a longing for celebrity. It is born in some much earlier than in others, while not a few die without experiencing its promptings. Here and there is one whose childhood's days are tinged with dreams of future glory. Manhood's aspirations take the place of boyhood's games. Not unseldom 'tis such as these that turn the whole current of a nation's history. Wish, will, determination they have ; experience alone is wanting, and this is often more than counterbalanced by unquailing confidence. It is a fault on the better side. The defects of old age are too generally real vices. Its hesitation degenerates into mistrust, its caution into cowardice, its over-

estimation of an opponent's resources into undervaluing a friend's support. It permits mischief to become powerful from too long considering how best it may be resisted. It allows a vice to fix itself beyond power of eradication from hesitating to take measures against it. Just the reverse are the errors committed by youth ; and they are of far less importance. They are never irreparable, never involving loss of time, never producing loss of hope. Procrastination is the watchword of the one, progress of the other. The former would stop the motion of the universe for fear its different parts should get into confusion, the latter would add to its speed, trusting thereby to improve the course of nature.

Avondale walked back to his chambers from Belgrave Gardens. Varied thoughts came whirling through his brain, but they pointed out to him somewhat indistinctly a goal which he had previously, in his hours of musing, marked for himself. The evening's conversation, too, would come back, chance words perhaps, but not without significance—

“ You should try to get a seat ; there is now a very good opportunity for a young man.”

Yes, here is what he had panted after. The Liberals were disorganised—could he not obtain a chief for them, and discipline them into a compact party again? Might he not aspire to a place among their chiefs, and to a seat in their councils?

“Get some prominent peer to put himself at their head,” Mr. Jardine had said, half seriously.

He thought of the greatness of his family in bygone days, of the foremost place his name had filled in annals of the olden time. He thought of the position it now occupied—swept off from the arena of public life, vanished from the sight, almost from the memory of men.

He thought of all this, and more clearly and distinctly rose before him the task he resolved upon. Young he was, but not younger than William of Orange when he checkmated the grey-headed counsellors of Louis le Grand, or than Pitt when he swayed the empire. Ability and intellect his career at Cambridge assured him of, where, though a desultory and unwilling reader, he had been high in the class lists. Courage, energy, audacity—three indispensable requisites for political success—his ancestors had

ever been noted for ; could he have degenerated from them ? A far deeper acquaintance he had with the ways of the world than any of his associates—what more was wanting ? Free, unencumbered, self-reliant, buoyant, he entered the lists—his inmost heart assured him of ultimate success.

Glorious is the award that awaits the victorious politician ; friends, rivals, and opponents unite to sing the pæan of praise, and his country hastens to do him honour ; delicious, tenfold delicious, is the cup that is pressed to his lips—by one hour of such bliss who would not think years of labour and anxiety more than overpaid ?

Such were Avondale's feelings.

But who was to be the leader ? This was the question that perplexed all, and he must settle it to his own satisfaction before he could venture to enter on the more difficult part of his undertaking. He ran over the names of the peers who took a foremost share in politics, but not one seemed exactly suitable. Wyre, as Tracy had expressed it, would be just the man but for his connections, his father, the Earl of Wigan, being the Tory chief. Then there was the Earl of Cotteswold,

one, nominally, like Wyre, a Tory, but his views were not definite, and he would, therefore, probably be distrusted by both sides. The Duke of Lincoln was the most eligible, but he, too, was a Tory in name, and to get him would necessitate the securing Mordaunt Tracy, and of this latter gentleman Avondale was somewhat doubtful.

Two others remained, known to Avondale by name and repute—the Marquis of Wharfedale and the Marquis of Exmoor, eldest son of the Duke of Dammonia, both members of the existing Government, both highly respected. These seemed, after careful thought, the most eligible for Avondale's purpose, should opportunity be offered of sounding their sentiments.

CHAPTER VI.

THE "Morning Mercury" was the newspaper which considered itself the exponent of Maitland's section. It had a wide circulation, but exerted not much influence on public opinion. Its "leaders" could be credited with both these results. They were, indeed, curious specimens of word-building. Matter they never contained, it was wholly unnecessary, but sentence after sentence was manufactured *ad libitum*, antithesis followed antithesis, and the "agony" was piled up to such an excruciating point that when the climax did come its effect was overpowering. Overpowering, unfortunately, on the wrong side, for the writers, competent enough at producing masses of "copy," were utterly unable to guide the feelings of their readers to the destined end, and their pathos would, spite of all their efforts, degenerate into bathos. Nevertheless, they were wonderful articles. *Non cugusvis est literas*

componere, a hundredfold more difficult is it to fill a whole column of print about—nothing, and the achievement deserves a proportionate acknowledgment. One other feature characterised this journal, and that was the unqualified laudation it bestowed on him whose opinions it supported. His sentiments were the height of wisdom. They sprang from a heart which was ever open to the cry of suffering, and were guided by a hand that never plotted his neighbour's confusion; they were spotlessly pure, immaculate, infallible; certainly more than human, and scarcely less than divine. His intentions were, like the *thermistēs* of Homer's kings, Jove-prompted. Justice to all was their motto—especially to one's own friends, some carping critics added—and free scope to the most deserving—with always the chief post for himself, was a similar emendation.

This journal Avondale had, of late, regularly perused, employing it as an index of the state of the Cabinet. On opening it next morning the first leader caught his eye. It was an unconcealed attack on the moderate portion of the Ministry—

“For six years the country and the country’s resources lay dormant under the lethargic sway of the late Premier. The effects of that trance have not yet passed away ; but we see in the distance a change—we might be justified in saying a revolution—coming on. Slowly, though surely, it is approaching ; impending events may hasten its advent. The present Government is but attempting some most necessary reforms in the methods of levying taxes, and yet the attempt is meeting with strenuous opposition. Not only are the hereditary adversaries of advance and improvement exerting all their efforts, but also many hitherto styled Liberals—and even some admitted to the councils of the party—are striving to make the work of reform impossible. These tactics can have but one result. They will arouse the people to a knowledge of their real interests ; they will bring out into clear light the distinction between treacherous adherents and reliable supporters. They will, in a word, bring matters to a crisis ; and for this we feel no regret—a deceitful friend is worse than an open enemy. But, beyond this, they will have another consequence. The nation once quickened to the vital necessity

of itself directing its own affairs, will remove the weak and timorous from the management, and place itself under the guidance of active, energetic, far-seeing men.”

“That is not bad,” ejaculated Avondale, “for a cut at Garmouth and Wharfedale. Some notice will have to be taken of it, yet it will scarcely be repudiated. It is so outspoken that the editor must have been well certain what he was about before allowing it to appear. Let me see. To-night brings on the third reading of the Bill for lowering the duties. Parties are pretty evenly matched in respect to it. If one could persuade Jardine to speak against it, his vote would doubtless turn the scale, and bring on the crisis rather more suddenly than the article anticipates.”

While he was musing, Stuart Jardine was ushered in.

“What, Walter, you barely out of bed yet ; and it is past eleven. Haven’t you begun breakfast?”

“Oh, yes; finished. Don’t look so disgusted, my dear fellow; I did not get to sleep very early last night, and I have been looking over this paper the last half-hour.”

“What is there in it to keep you up in such a bright May morning?”

“Only a feeler; read it yourself while I put off this dressing-gown. But what brings you here at this hour?”

“Oh, I forgot. You must come to lunch, to arrange with the mater about the flower show to-morrow.”

“Just the thing. I suppose the governor will be at home; I wish to see him.”

“Yes, I daresay; but what is the matter?”

“Not much. Excuse me a minute or two.”

He made his appearance again in a short time, and they strolled off together, down Piccadilly, and across Hyde Park.

“Well, Stuart, what do you think of the article?”

“I scarcely read it. Can’t understand how fellows will bother so much about other people’s affairs, and blackguard one another like so many costermongers. It may be glory; but, at first blush, the prospect certainly is not very inviting.”

“*Chacun à son goût*; but are those your inmost sentiments, my friend?”

“ Yes ; that is, qualified. I don’t despise fame—true fame, mind you. I can honour a man who dies for

‘ The ashes of his fathers,
And the temples of his gods,’

or who gives up everything for the love of truth. In case of necessity, I hope I shall not be found wanting. But politics is altogether a different concern. A successful statesman must be crafty, treacherous, apt at lying, skilful at dissimulation, ever ready to give up old opinions, or to throw off old acquaintances, and to embrace new ones—a thorough scoundrel, in fact, who in common life would not be tolerated for an instant. Honesty is only an incumbrance, and he soon gets rid of it ; honour he claims to possess—but very unnecessarily, for no one ever credits him with it ; religion he may have, but it must be of a strange creed. Longfellow, however, somewhere hints that Lucifer may not be wholly past praying for, but be reserved for some good purpose not yet known.”

“ You paint a dark picture. Do you forget Pitt, and Canning, and Peel ?”

“ No ; nor Shaftesbury, nor Walpole, nor the

Pelhams. There is one for each of yours. But here is Talbot coming ; who would have thought of meeting him at this early period ?”

Talbot came up, and walked on with them—a thick-set, somewhat affected young man, not much past his twenty-second birthday. His face told his birth—he was a younger son of Viscount Risborough—and told, too, a weakness of character and a tendency to dissipation. His easy disposition and yielding nature made him a general favourite; but they also made him a ready victim to the allurements of sharpers, and he was, consequently, more addicted to the gaming-table than his relatives would have approved.

“I called at your place last night, Avondale, but you were out.”

“Yes. Wanted me to go to the Adelphi, I suppose ?”

“No. I intended to go to Clair Street. I have lost there rather heavily once or twice lately, and wished you to look on to see fair play.”

“Better keep away from the place altogether. It is a regular hell. Have you ever seen it, Stuart ?”

“No. Since you saved me from destruction at Cambridge, I have fought shy of dice and cards. I never could clearly see how it was I became involved in that affair ; and, therefore, I have kept clear of any approach to its repetition.”

“I don’t see the force of your reasoning,” objected Talbot. “If you once get bitten that is no reason why ever after you should eschew the game.”

“I don’t know what you understand by bitten. If it means risking honour and character to enrich a parcel of thieves, I imagine it is every reason why you should avoid it in future.”

“Oh, no ! If I had any idea I should get into such a scrape, I would never touch a card again. The people one meets at Clair Street are not sharpers. Brooke, the proprietor, never plays ; he makes his money out of the payments made at the door. You know most who go there—Wyversley, Sinclair, Tom Lewis (I fancy he is paid to mark at billiards), young Stansville, and your friend Dawson.”

“Yes ; I believe Dawson is rather too well acquainted with such places,” replied Avondale ;

“and I am sorry for it. Do you take my advice, and give up gambling in time.”

“Of course, I shall ; but do oblige me by coming in one evening. I don’t for an instant suspect any underhand work ; but, if you would just look on, perhaps I should recover my luck.”

“Very complimentary you are getting. I have no objection to dropping in once, just to show Stuart the establishment, if he will venture to accompany us.”

“I will go with pleasure,” replied Jardine, “if any information is to be gained from the visit.”

“Thanks ; so do. When will be most convenient for you, Avondale?”

“Any day. But, stay ; the night before the Derby would be the best opportunity for our friend to add to his experience.”

“That is a fortnight yet ; but I suppose I must be content. Excuse me. Here is Lady Barnett’s carriage coming ; I must say a few words to her.”

He left them ; and the two friends passed on, bowing to her ladyship as she rolled by, and receiving a gracious salutation in return.

CHAPTER VII.

LUNCHEON over, and the arrangements for the morrow's fête satisfactorily settled, Avondale, making an apology to the ladies, sought out Mr. Jardine. He found him in his usual sanctum, the library.

"Are you very busily engaged, sir?"

"No, not at all; after I have directed these two or three letters, if you have anything for me."

He went on scribbling for a few minutes, making, meanwhile, observations on the fine weather, and the beautiful foliage the trees were putting on. "And now I am at your service."

"I had better come direct to the point. Have you seen this morning's 'Mercury'?"

"No; I never read it. Why?"

"There is an interesting article in the forefront. Perhaps you would look at it. It bears most unmistakably the impress of inspiration."

Mr. Jardine took the paper extended him, glanced hastily over the part pointed out, and then reperused it more carefully.

“Well ; what conclusion do you draw, Walter?”

“Feathers are frequently thrown up to see which way the wind blows. Is not this a direct attack on certain of Maitland’s colleagues?”

“Very possibly ; what then? They cannot notice it ; there is but one course before them.”

“Excuse my venturing to hazard an opinion. Every one tactily submits to his vagaries because they must ; that is the sum total of the reason. If the Premier and Wharfedale, and so forth, are to resign, is it absolutely necessary that they should accept their fate as a dispensation of Providence? Instead of humbly yielding up all authority into the hands of him who kicks them out, would they and their friends not feel some satisfaction in making his position as precarious as possible? My dear sir, you have, it seems to me, a rare occasion for putting yourself forward. You will not join Maitland ; why not, then, throw your weight into the scale against him, and boldly claim for yourself a place amongst the

leaders? This article plainly enough refers to the opposition aroused against the abolition of minor duties. The rejection of the proposal would at ordinary times affect the Government; but it would now be seized upon by the advanced section as an excuse for bringing matters to an issue. Their plans may not yet be quite matured, and the incontinent defeat of the measure might disconcert them. Anyhow, it would precipitate what must shortly happen. Pardon my presumption; you have some following, and still more influence in the House. Go down to-night—the third reading comes off—speak against the Bill, and divide. You will, beyond question, be in the majority. We shall have an adjournment for some days; and, when Parliament next meets, it will be shown what the future Government is to be.”

“You speak as if you were our leader, urging us on. The opinions you have just put forth are my own; but I hesitate to be too hasty. I do not like to cut away the ground beneath my feet; and if I did not meet with the support you anticipate, I should both injure the interests of my friends, and not advance my own credit.”

“The Rubicon must be crossed at some time or other. I feel morally certain that you would defeat the Government, and, taking a fair view of the political horizon, I cannot imagine how such a proceeding could be productive of anything but advantage to your side.”

“Well, I will carefully consider what best to do before the debate comes on. I may and I may not take your advice. I will, of course, meanwhile consult with some of the members who have the same ideas as myself in the matter.”

CHAPTER VIII.

AVONDALE went back to Granstone Street, and thence to his Club, the Western. In Piccadilly he met one of the frequenters of Clair Street Maison d'Or—the Earl of Wyversley.

Wyversley was just entering life, not yet much past his twenty-third year. His title, one of the most renowned, if not one of the oldest in the United Kingdom, admitted him at once, on arriving at manhood, into the best society. His property, large at his father's death, had been much increased in value by careful management during a long minority; and, in addition, the unspent yearly balances had accumulated at his banker's to over £300,000. His talents, exceeding the average, had been very carefully expanded, at first under the direct personal supervision of his mother, who still survived, and afterwards under the best tutors that could be obtained.

His demeanour as a child had been all that could be desired—docile, attentive, affectionate ; but this goodness of disposition became his curse as he passed from boyhood. The harpies of modern life marked him for their prey, and, ere he left Oxford he had yielded to their machinations.

Easy enough is it for the wealthy and noble to secure the friendship of the learned and honourable. Difficult is it for them, if in the least degree open to the allurements of dissipation, to avoid the fellowship of blacklegs and knaves. All flattery is pleasant ; not a vice but has some attractive points. Delirious is the first draught of life which a youth takes when 'tis the supple cunning fingers of his own age that mix the cup, and witching beauty that holds it to his lips. Hotter and hotter courses the fiery blood through the veins, and maddening grow the passions when liquid eyes beam love upon us, and wreathing arms enfold us round, when lip to lip and heart to heart unchecked the siren's form we press. Once, once only, can the excitement be tasted in full fruition, and it never can return.

Even already Wyversley was wearying of the

life he had plunged into. Cards and dice afforded little amusement, the billiard-table had lost its charm, wine had never been a potent instrument of temptation, even women's wiles were beginning to lose their efficacy; and he was now thinking of varying his amusements by keeping a regular racing stable, and had bought one or two horses as a first instalment. Consequently, he was sauntering along, desperately hard up apparently for some mode of killing time, and his eye brightened as he recognised Avondale.

"How d'ye do? Glad to see you—where have you been this long time?"

"Not out of town; but may I ask you the same question, Wyversley? You have kept rather quiet lately."

"I? I can scarcely tell—over to Paris, I believe, for a week or two at Easter—but I have been in town the last fortnight, and I am heartily tired of it. Can you suggest any mode of killing time?"

"Killing time, my dear fellow! Why, your every wish is satisfied almost before it is formed. Tired of London, and the season is hardly begun."

“I know it is, and yet lately there is a miserable kind of inanity will keep coming over one. Two years ago I could not have credited that *ennui* could ever so thoroughly possess me. I have an idea of dabbling in racing—or running the Brighton coach again. It would be something fresh.”

“That would be a regular case of the devil finding work for idle hands. Your present mode of living is—don’t be astonished at my preaching—foolish enough, but let us hope it is only sowing your wild oats. If you go to the turf you will infallibly be dragged into a whirlpool from which there is little chance of escape. And for your mother’s sake, if not your own, don’t run the risk of that. Don’t forget that times have thoroughly altered since the days of the Regency. What would then have been the outburst of fresh spirits, or an amiable weakness would now be considered as little better than downright crime.”

“A better sermon than I gave you credit for, Avondale—but, I dare say, it is not far wrong.”

“What more could you desire than you have? Wealth, rank, abilities—every opportunity that

man can ask for. Don't disgrace the conqueror of Erdfort, or the Minister who signed the treaty of Naples. Take your seat in the House ; or, if you imagine you have not much experience yet, go for a two years' tour to India and the East, and back through the United States and Canada."

"I have seen the latter. I went there during one of the 'longs,' with Dr. Watson. Mother was particularly anxious I should see the new world ; she thinks it necessary every fellow in Parliament should get acquainted with the 'Yankees.'"

"And the Countess is quite right. Won't you try to return her kindness by making good use of your station?"

"So I should if you, or some one of your stamp, were always with me. But those fellows get round one—and, then, there are the women—you have never proved the force of their wiles. Ah ! do you know Auricoma ? She is beautiful ; and a splendid girl, too ; no nonsense about her, or conceit. She cut your friend Dawson finely the other evening."

"Dawson is certainly not a friend of mine.

There is something about him that excites, I can't tell why, my dislike."

"One of your Dr. Fells, though his cousin is not—at least that's the report. There are a number of people out this afternoon." (They had reached the park, and were going down Rotten Row.) "The Lady's Mile is beginning to look lively once more. See, there's Kate Vandeleur and old Killarney sticking close to her. I suppose I must take off my hat, but I should prefer telling her my opinion of the way she is treating Sinclair."

Miss Vandeleur, a showy girl, riding a spirited horse, reined up at Wyversley's salutation, but his lordship, apparently not noticing, had passed on.

"Mrs. Marshland; do you see her carriage? One would imagine she had never heard of the Divorce Court. Lady Barnet, too. Go where you will, one comes across her."

"Yes; I met her the other side this morning."

"You don't know her? She is the centre of half the political intrigues of the day."

"Really? I had better make her acquaintance, then?"

“Why? I thought you were going to the Bar. You don’t intend changing?”

“I do, seriously. The law is not inviting to some, and I think I could do better in politics.”

“I am glad to hear it. If my assistance can be of any service, you are welcome to it. How long will the present Government stand, that is as it is?”

“Till to-morrow morning, perhaps.”

“You don’t give it a lengthened life. I should like to have a talk with you some evening. But here is the fair lady we were speaking about.”

A natty Victoria dashed by, drawn by two grey ponies. A flush, more akin to love than mere pleasure, lit up the Earl of Wyversley’s cheeks as he bowed to the sole occupant, and received in return a winning smile.

It was Auricoma, the “golden-haired,” and well she deserved the appellation. Her luxuriant auburn locks were familiar to every frequenter of the parks; but these formed not her sole attractions. A fine figure and excellent carriage, a beautiful countenance and beaming eyes, joined to an equable temper and graceful manners,

made her undisputed queen of her class—made her, too, the successful rival of many a high-born belle, and the dread of many an anxious mother. Not only lads from Eton, and youths from the Universities, but older men, who had seen much of the world, sought her company, and flocked to her villa at Chelsea; and thus, the name of her whose very existence should have been ignored was often heard in West End drawing-rooms, and modest ladies scorned not openly to envy her influence, and unblushingly to imitate her actions and mode of dress. Eight years previously she had come to town as attendant at a restaurant. A short apprenticeship there naturally fitted her for the boards of a small theatre, where good looks, rather than acting, formed the attraction. The glitter of the stage and the applause of the audience fanned still more the innate pride that first had incited her to leave her native village. She assumed her present mode of living, and for the past three seasons she had filled a position, understood, if not recognised in society. She occupied a box at the opera, and, when there, was never unaccompanied; her equipage was the model of

perfection, her receptions rivalled those of the Countess of Garmouth, and even of Lady Barnet; in a word, she was a sign, a striking sign of the newer order of things drawing on.

Wyversley soon remembered that he had an engagement, and, having pressed his friend to call upon him, took his departure.

CHAPTER IX.

AVONDALE turned back to his club. He found rather an unusual number of members congregated. The position of the Ministry naturally formed the topic of conversation. From that inexplicable species of prescience which coming events so oft excite in men's minds, there had arisen a very prevalent feeling that the night's debate would give birth to some fresh arrangement. All sorts of speculations were hazarded. Some thought that the Premier alone would vacate office; others that he would be followed by his own immediate friends; while a few hazarded the opinion that the other section would resign; and here and there a solitary individual even ventured to suggest that perhaps the Tories might be called in.

Such an idea, however, could be looked upon as little more than a joke. This party was in a minority of at least fifty. They were, it is

true, very compact—compact as a body, that is. Amongst the leaders there existed considerable disunion. Their only hope of getting into power lay in the thorough disintegration of their opponents—a not very likely probability. Toryism was, in fact, under a cloud, and had been so for some time past—during the whole of the closing period of the late Premier's life. Its tenets had become considerably modified, if not altogether changed. Some observers were hardy enough to assert that it was a *vox et præterea nihil*; that the party, as far as it possessed real existence, existed only to gratify the ambition of those who were at its head, rather than as representing distinct principles; that if ever again it wielded the reins of Government it would find its traditions but evanescent myths, and would be necessitated by the mere alteration and advance of the nation's interest to follow the broad route marked out by their opponents.

From the main body of Liberals the Radicals must be distinguished. They were not strong either in numbers—a wide estimate would scarcely reckon them at three score—or in principles; the vast bulk of the English nation is, as

it ever has been at heart, imbued with a love for long-tried principles and long-confirmed traditions, and doubtful of the expediency of changing existing institutions for new-fangled, unproved notions. But the Radicals were—at least in their own estimation—a power in the State; and, indeed, received considerable deference even from those who thoroughly disagreed with them. Many causes produced this. They had, more than any other party, distinct, well-defined aims before them; and the importance of such an object in adding to the weight of any body of men cannot be overvalued. They stood between the two great powers into which the nation has ever been divided, and thus they were often enabled to bend each to their peculiar views.

But what, beyond anything else, gave them an unreal significance in the eyes of the world was the possession of orators of more than stentorian lungs, and of irrepressible volubility. This has ever been a characteristic of Republicanism, of that advanced Liberalism which, having no real basis in the natural order of things, maintains itself solely by the persistent spreading of its own doctrines, and the unqualified condemnation

of those of others—a mode of procedure which not unseldom has some success with the uneducated and the ill-judging.

Of these orators, the most notorious was Mr. Jonathan Sloe, M.P. for Shodditon—a man endowed with a good voice and great command of language, and having considerable knowledge of human nature, and more than English determination and obstinacy. He was now advancing in years, had long been in the House, and had of late become very intimate with Maitland.

CHAPTER X.

EXPECTATION drew Avondale from his bed next morning a full hour before his general time of rising. He got over his breakfast with unwonted celerity, and eagerly directed his attention to the "Times." The abstract of Parliamentary business gave him the information he longed for, but scarcely hoped to find; the propositions of Government for the abolition of minor duties had been thrown out in a full House by a decided majority—295 to 256.

He turned to the speeches. After Mr. Blink and Mr. Blank *et hoc omne genus*, had had their say, Mr. Jardine arose—

"Mr. Speaker, I have long hesitated to offer any remarks on the proposal before us; and it is only after the most careful consideration that I now venture to trouble the House with a few words in respect to it. I feel that the observations I am about to make, and the decision that I

have come to, will probably expose me to some animadversion; and, therefore, I trust that if I appear hesitating or undecided some allowance will be made for my peculiar position. The proposal before us is to lower considerably, and in some cases to abolish altogether, a variety of minor imposts—is it necessary? is it expedient? is it useful? In the first place, as to its need. No one will, I think, assert for an instant that the measure has been forced on us by the general state of the nation or of trade. The nation, I venture to say, for the most part does not know even the names of many of these articles; and, as to trade, the reduction or total abolition of the tax on any of them will not add a tithe to its consumption. Take the case of ‘succession powder.’ A few years ago it brought in nearly £20,000 a year; but, since the establishment of the Divorce Court, this has barely averaged £8,000. This is in the judgment of many, with whom I agree, a preparation which might with advantage to the community be entirely dispensed with, and, therefore, could not be too highly charged. The Government, however, think differently. They do not, having respect to the

advisability of restricting its sale to certain authorised parties, wish to remove the tax altogether ; but to lower it to a nominal amount. This policy I cannot support. If dues are to be remitted, let them be remitted from the food of the lowest classes—that part of the revenue which the wealthy bear, especially that part which is derived from the, even to them, totally needless luxuries of modern life, may, perhaps, also be lightened—though I question it—but certainly not in the mode now under consideration. Then, there are the duties on coats of arms and signet rings, £5,050 ; on hair powder, £250 ; on the privilege of employing running footmen, £300 ; on the import of turtles, edible bird's nests, and other materials of food—of the higher class, that is—£2,700. . . . These amount to a gross total of £9,700 a year. This sum is derived from articles utterly useless ; their price will not be lowered one farthing by sweeping it away—why then do so ? . . . Especially would I say a few words on the reasoning that has been brought forward in support of the abolition of the 1s. per ton at present levied on the export of coal. Many uphold it on the broad ground of

free trade. Such a defence it is very difficult for one like myself to attempt to impugn ; but to these uncompromising advocates of a grand and most valuable doctrine—one that has revolutionised modern trade and wrought incalculable good, not only to this country, but to the whole world—one that has attained a recognition unlooked for in the most sanguine dreams of its early apostles, and is breaking down year by year the walls of partition that separate peoples—to these I would put the question—are you assured that your principles may not, under certain circumstances, be pushed somewhat too far? Must not the stringency of a wide, general rule be now and then relaxed to meet particular cases? Our minerals are the very backbone of the nation. Whatever of them is removed cannot be replaced—once taken away, they are gone for ever ; and, with their disappearance, disappears our proud pre-eminence. Carefully considering this, would it not be well to employ them at home as much as possible? Indeed, we require for our own purposes a quantity of coal and iron annually increasing—a quantity which the mind cannot grasp, which is measured not by hundreds

or thousands, but by millions of tons, which has been more than trebled in the last quarter of a century, and which must itself rapidly produce the exhaustion of the supplies still remaining. On the broad grounds—the vital grounds rather—of self-preservation, I maintain that the withdrawal of coal from this kingdom to feed the manufactures and the commerce of our rivals should be restricted, if not absolutely prohibited. But the majority who have spoken in favour of the abolition base their argument on a fallacy so gross as to be well-nigh inconceivable. My right hon. friend, the Minister of Finance, apparently takes the same view—I say apparently, for, though I am aware his severe intellect seldom allows him to join in a joke, yet in this I can with difficulty credit his seriousness. We are told that the taking off the 1s. per ton will lower the price of coal by the same amount in the home market. The assertion is preposterous. On what is it based? My coal merchant has 1,000 tons in his yard—it makes no difference to him whether I or a Frenchman pay him a guinea a ton for his article. The Frenchman has also to pay 1s. to the custom-house. If this be re-

moved, he will get his coals—not I mine—at so much the less price. There will be no possible means by which the cost to me will be lowered. This charge brings into the revenue about £500,000 yearly ; and the whole of it comes from foreign consumers—not a farthing from our own. . . . Again, game licenses are to be reduced £12,000 per annum—why? On whom does this burden fall? Certainly on those well able to bear it. The charges for stamps on various documents—on peers’ writs, &c.—are to be similarly lessened by £1,000. This is not much, but if the diminution is to be made at all let it be made in the Post-office. . . . The whole of these duties last year reached £1,040,000. This is an important sum, and if it can be abolished so much the better for the state of the country. I will assume that this may be done. I think it can, the revenue shows a little revived elasticity—but can we not turn this surplus to better account? It is admitted that taxes on necessities should first be lightened. As this is not the intention of the Ministry, they doubtless consider that reductions have gone far enough in that direction. Admitting this, I still think this

million of money may be utilised for the advantage of the poorer classes. We have just now a cry, loud, and increasing in loudness, of the slackness of employment. We hear of meetings and assemblies for the purpose of enlightening labourers as to the openings offered them in the colonies, we see philanthropic men and women exerting themselves to help on the work of emigration. Now, if this sum were directed into the same channel, it would be of the greatest assistance. Supposing £200 were allotted to each family, one-third to be given them, and the remainder lent, and supposing one out of every four could not or did not pay back the loan, thus making one-half to be actually given away, it would furnish the means of conveying to the colonies, and starting them in life, these 10,000 families yearly, or say, from 60,000 to 80,000 human beings. This removal would greatly diminish the competition amongst those who remain, and would have a wonderful effect on the poor-rates.”

The hon. gentleman was frequently interrupted with cheers and groans, according to the feelings of his hearers, but the cheers greatly predomi-

nated, and when he sat down uninterrupted applause followed for some minutes.

The Minister of Finance attempted a reply, but was heard most impatiently, his words being almost inaudible, from the continuous cries of "Divide, divide, 'vide, 'vide!"

After the announcement of the figures, Mr. Maitland, in very agitated tones, said that—

"Owing to the unforeseen occurrence he must ask for an adjournment, in order that his colleagues might decide on the course they had to pursue in the emergency. He therefore moved that the House stand adjourned till next Wednesday."

Here shouts of "The Derby!" arose from all sides. "Till next Thursday!"

From the speeches Avondale turned to the "leaders." The first contained a hasty analysis of the position of Parliament. "The Liberals in a majority of seventy defeated on one of their own measures. This is a fact that wants explanation;" and thereupon the writer proceeded to explain it. He attributed the victory partly to the unexpectedness of the attack, and to the direct weight of Mr. Jardine's opinions, partly to

defects inherent in the measure, and to its apparent neglect of the concerns of the lower classes, partly to disunion amongst the Ministry. He did not pretend to regret it, as it would place the reins of Government in the hands of some party with definite principles. And he then speculated on this party, and who would form it—speculations which, like much of the matter that encumbers newspaper columns, were worth just what any ideas are worth which a scribbler evokes off-hand from out of the depths of his consciousness.

CHAPTER XI.

THE day turned out splendid, just one of those glorious days which are to be met with at the union of spring and summer. The sun shone bright, but its rays were not insufferably hot. Not a cloud interrupted the deep blue which even a London sky occasionally assumes. May had nearly come to an end. The trees had just put on their early foliage, the earth was clad in a mantle of brightest green, the flowers were wearing their most gorgeous tints. Oh the lovely spring! How beautiful it is, how enchanting is the form in which it presents itself, how exquisite is the pleasure it affords—and yet how short-lived! Summer succeeds, hot, burning, overpowering, eager to add full fruition to the undertakings of its predecessor, and destroying them by its very impetuosity. So in life—youth commences, delighted with his task, carefully, neatly laying out the foundations of buildings fair as the fabrics that in day-dreams rise before

his view, and vast as the extent at which he estimates his own powers ; manhood completes the work, blurring its symmetry, defacing its adornments, contracting its dimensions ; manhood, despoiled of the romance that once it had, occupied with the cares of routine life, hardened by the strife for gold.

Charming were the Horticultural Society's gardens, still more charming the crowds that filled them. It was Nature's festival—she had brought from every land, and from every clime, her rarest growths, and her loveliest products. She had laid under contribution the sides of the snowy Himalayas and the uplands of di Gama's Cape ; she had robbed the trim-kept gardens of the Celestials and the boundless prairies of the red men ; and thus from her treasury she exhibited to her visitors a variety of colour, and a wealth of bloom, beyond conception. It was beauty's reunion—fairy forms thronged the tents, witching faces rivalled the loveliness of the blossoms over which they hung, dazzling eyes were glittering around, the most fascinating of every age were met together. Could love be absent from the throng ?

The Jardines were there, with Walter Avondale. His countenance showed unmistakably the pleasure he was receiving. Mary Jardine was equally delighted.

“There is Mrs. Peppercorn—do you know her, Mr. Avondale?”

“Not personally, I am glad to say. She is a regular termagant, leads her husband a frightful life.”

“How do you know? I thought you never repeated the common gossip.”

“Well, I hope I don’t slander her. Look what a fine—what is it?—something like a lily. Almost as enchanting as the divinity standing near it.”

“Dear me, how complimentary you suddenly have become. I will tell Maud Redcliffe when we get round to her.”

“So do—she will be delighted—gets but few compliments.”

“That is too bad—it isn’t the truth. How grand Lady Diddleham appears to day.”

“Yes, extremely so—and how grand her husband, considering he is but the sixth.”

“For shame. You are thoroughly scurrilous

to-day. I have a great mind to take you over to Mrs. Simpkins."

"Oh, don't, please; she has half-a-dozen daughters—yes, and the whole bevy are here—and not a single person with them. It would be the height of cruelty. I should not get out of her clutches the rest of the afternoon. But here is the Marquis of Wharfedale coming. He owes your papa something for last night's work."

The Marquis came up with his wife. He was a well-built man, about 40 years of age, not particularly handsome or intellectual, but endued with the grace of a man of the world, and the pleasing address of an English nobleman. The Marchioness was ten years younger; a fine, stately woman, in the full bloom of female perfection. She was of the oldest patrician descent, being the younger daughter of the Duke of Hants. Avondale drew back, while the salutations were being made. These over, the Marquis, as soon as he conveniently could, drew Mr. Jardine behind the ladies.

"My dear sir, you have taken a wonderful responsibility upon you. It is a terrible uproar which your speech and its result have made.

Why, we shall all have to go out, and the Queen will send for you."

"No, my lord, not quite that. But I certainly did greater things than I anticipated."

"So I imagine; but that does not alter the fact. What are we to do?"

"That I cannot say. I should not be surprised to hear you were all in a state of perplexity. It is, I presume, really, though not avowedly, a case of Radical versus Liberal—and the former has the advantage."

"Yes, I dare say that is about the truth. I suppose we shall see for some months—it won't last longer—a crucial experiment as to the vitality of our constitution. Meanwhile some of us must remain out in the cold."

"Have you seen any of your colleagues? Gar-mouth, for instance, what will he do?"

"He called on me this morning. He had not then been able to come to a fixed determination, though I believe he will not attempt to retain the premiership. I saw, too, Kerr—he seemed pleased rather than the reverse. He will, probably, go out, if only to have the pleasure of pitching into Maitland without restraint. Of course there will

be one or two others who will follow—Williams, for instance, and, perhaps, Edmunds.”

“Yes, I think you are right, but who will take their places?”

“That is the rub. I don’t know any more than yourself, and very probably not as much. There is Sloe—Maitland would like to buy his following by putting him into the post he vacates, but it would be a very questionable stroke of policy. The gain might not be counterbalanced by the loss.”

“A new Chancellor, too, will be required, and, likely enough, Sir Edward Pilgrim will give up—who is to supply their places?”

“Very doubtful. Eastbourne would do, but then it can’t be. His being Keeper of the King’s conscience was always bad enough, but, after recent revelations, it would be an insult to common honesty. The Chief Baron Repton, I suppose, will be promoted, and the Solicitor-General take his office. Then FitzHenry could be Attorney-General—he would not serve as junior member under Claybourne.”

“No, nor take anything from such a medley as Maitland will get together. He has an im-

mense practice, half of which, I dare say, would be lost to him as Attorney-General, and if he were to lose the dignity, too, at the end of seven or eight months, he would make a poor bargain."

"Just so. He would do much better by waiting till the 'king gets his own again.' But I have heard a whisper that some temptation has been held out to you."

"Perhaps yes, perhaps no—I cannot myself positively say ; but you know me well enough to be assured I am not a Republican."

"I hope not. By the by, I must congratulate you on the speech. It reads remarkably well. You must have carefully prepared it."

"No; there was no preparation. In truth, my decision to deliver, was chiefly influenced by a young friend of mine. You must allow me to introduce him. He has first-rate abilities and great energy. He is just now looking out for a seat, and when he gets into the House will, I trust, soon make his mark there."

The speaker turned round for Avondale. He was a few yards off, chattering and laughing with Mary Jardine, and some mutual acquaint-

ances. At Mr. Jardine's beckoning, he came forward, and was presented to the peer.

"Avondale—Avondale. Excuse me, but have I not had the pleasure of hearing your name before?"

"Your lordship, perhaps, has heard of my grandfather—an M.P. at the beginning of this century, who was rather too well known for his conviviality."

"Yes, of course I have. Are you his grandson? I am sure it increases the pleasure of your acquaintance. From what I remember of his doings, I think few men could have had a wider circle of connections, and there are many to whom it will be a delight to commence intercourse with one of his family."

"Your lordship is too kind. I had no idea my relative was so—may I say celebrated? My father has been almost silent to me with respect to him."

"Is your father then alive? I am surprised he does not frequent town."

"My father's estate, my lord, was very much reduced, compared with what it had been when it came into his hands."

“ And you must restore it. Mr. Jardine tells me that you are anxious to figure in Parliament—you may command my influence. But, Jardine, you must excuse me, there is a Cabinet Council on directly. Allow me first to introduce you, Mr. Avondale, to Lady Wharfedale. She will be much pleased with the acquisition to her circle.”

At this moment the Earl of Wyversley joined them. All three saluted him with great cordiality.

“ What,” said Wharfedale, who was one of his trustees, “ do you know our young friend ? ”

“ Yes, sir, for some long time past.”

“ I am glad of it ; he will, I hope, keep you out of mischief. It is very fortunate you are here. I am compelled to run away. Lady Wharfedale will not wish to leave—may I ask you to attend her ? ”

His lordship led Avondale up to the Marchioness.

“ Alice, I have made quite a discovery. This is Mr. Avondale, a relative of the gentleman who figured so conspicuously in the Regency days.”

Her ladyship gave Avondale a gracious smile, and expressed her interest at the information.

“He is ambitious, Jardine says. You must criticise him ; and, let me see, give him an invitation for your next Friday’s reception. Pardon my unconscionable haste, but I cannot stay—you know I am engaged—and I leave you in good custody, Wyversley promises to supply my place.”

He raised his hat to the ladies generally, bowed to Mrs. Jardine in particular, nodded to Avondale, and took his departure.

They loitered on through the grounds, meeting friends and encountering acquaintances in every direction. Such numbers were present—all London, in fact, had turned out—that motion if desired had been impossible, but thereby only the better opportunity was given for conversation. Wyversley bestowed his attention more especially to Mrs. Jardine’s daughters. Mr. Jardine did not shine as a drawing-room knight, so that the care of Lady Wharfedale fell to Avondale. He succeeded to admiration. Indeed, when not pre-occupied or under the influence of the constitutional melancholy he inherited from his father, he had ever been distinguished for the charm and vivacity of his manner. To-day, in addition to his innate

liveliness he had every incentive to appear his best. Affairs were shaping themselves as though his own hand were guiding them; full success had attended his first attempt, the weather was exhilarating, the company was most brilliant, and of that company, one of the most stately and attractive women was his companion. Jest, wit, amusing observation on the world's ways, sarcastic remarks on its failings, succeeded each other in quick succession. The Marchioness was gratified, pleased, captivated. There was a freshness, a piquance, a glitter, and yet withal a depth, a reality, a substance about Avondale that formed a wonderful attraction.

Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt Tracy came by, and stopped to exchange compliments.

"Do you know them? You have a large number of friends."

"Not many, Lady Wharfedale. I have seen the Tracys a few times at Mr. Jardine's."

"You are very intimate there?"

"Rather. I was fortunate enough to do Stuart Jardine a service at College, and so, since I have come to town, they have welcomed me most heartily to their house."

“And you know Wyversley, too. I should be so glad if you could get him to turn his thoughts to real work. Have you been long acquainted with him? You must have very great influence over young men of your own age.”

“You pay me such a compliment that I almost doubt its sincerity.”

“Oh no, I never flatter. I met him first, about two years since, just after he had left Oriel. Where is he? It is really too bad of him to run away from me like this. I shall tell him he is a recreant knight.”

There was a sudden and rapid diminution of the people around, and a rush to one tent.

“Dear me! What great catastrophe is it, Mr. Avondale?”

“Probably the Royal Family. Our middle class, with the innate boorishness that characterises them, take the first opportunity they get of mobbing anything new. No matter what it is, man or animal, animate or inanimate, the Prince of Wales, His Majesty of Dahomey, Rajah Brooke, the Chief Apostle of the Mormons, a new species of ape, or a Maori's cooking apparatus, they all crowd round, and gape and stare, and make their

horribly vulgar remarks—it is perfectly abominable.”

“ You are quite excited. But what is the middle class ; where do you draw the line ; would it include yourself, for instance ? ”

“ If it did, that would not alter the fact ; but I fancy I should scarcely come under the designation as commonly interpreted. My lineage can probably be traced back as far as that of the House of Wharfedale, or Hants. An Avondale fought at Hastings, and they have since taken part in every civil war, and in almost every battle in England. Many times have we been offered a peerage.”

“ Indeed ! I am rejoiced to hear it. But I merely meant to raise an objection to the indiscriminate, unqualified contempt so often thrown against that class, which is, with all its failings, the mainstay of the nation.”

“ I should be very sorry to traduce them. There are, of course, many exceptions to what I said, but it is not the less true that the business part of the community, the wealth-getting class *par excellence*, are singularly without refinement, as compared with their neighbours of the same

standing on the Continent. Their thoughts are so thoroughly absorbed in the one idea, that they never perceive the want of polish and cultivation till it is too late to acquire it."

"And there is much excuse for them. You forget how intense is the strife for existence in the present day. Unless a person is born to fortune, no matter what his connections, he must enter into the competition which is daily becoming fiercer."

"You astonish me. The woman's movement has certainly gained a most valuable auxiliary."

"Oh no, not at all."

Here Wyversley joined them.

"Well, sir, have you not been a most gallant cavalier? I scarcely know how most fittingly to tender you thanks for the pleasure your company has afforded me."

"I must humbly crave pardon. I—I—I—I will—I cannot express my contrition; but Avondale is such an attractive attendant that if I had remained, he would have cut me out altogether. I should have been snubbed, or at least quietly consigned to utter oblivion."

"Do you hear him, Mr. Avondale? What

shall be done to him? His coolness and presumption pass belief. He first feigns compunction for his fault, and then extenuates it."

"Send him back to his late charge, or introduce him to the charming Mrs. Simpkins. Do you see her—the person just opposite, with the flaming bonnet-strings, surrounded by a whole bevy of nymphs? They are her daughters, half-a-dozen in number, if they are all here, as is pretty certain to be the case."

"Oh, yes. You know the lady, Mr. Avondale—take him across, you have my full permission."

"But not mine though," ejaculated the object of the proposal. "Your plebeian grandees are all very well in their way, but I must be excused. That elderly personage, I will be bound, Avondale, is the partner, so they style it, of some grocer or tallow-chandler, no doubt a most excellent individual."

"Yes, I believe Mr. Samuel Simpkins is a general dealer, whatever it may be, in the city, wherever that is. He is an alderman, an anomalous dignitary, whose greatness chiefly lies in his official robes, very much resembling those

which, perhaps, Lady Wharfedale has seen some beadles wearing."

"For shame, Mr. Avondale. I will not listen to you."

"He is also M.P. for Dirty-lucre, in East Anglia—an enterprising person, it will be allowed. It is, however, reported that it was his ambitious partner who, for the sake of the girls, made him do this. The election cost him £7,000, and a petition was talked of, but both sides were in the same predicament. He is a Dissenter, almost inevitably; and he is a steadfast Liberal. In the House he is somewhat of a bore, and has a propensity to discard the H, as superfluous in most words where it is usually pronounced, and to stick it on where not wanted. He was to have been presented last year, and went through a series of lessons on deportment; but the task was beyond his powers—the sword would get between his legs and pitch him on his nose as he went forward, and pitch him the reverse way as he backed out. As one consequence of his failure, the rumour goes that Maitland is trying to get the Court dress abolished *in toto*."

"If ever he is introduced to me," said the

Marchioness, "I will report to him the slanders you have been uttering."

"If he does not hear of them till the introduction takes place, I need not be under any fear. Poor man, he could never face the appearance of so much splendour and beauty."

"You are incorrigible, sir. Reginald, may I ask in whose custody you left your late charge?"

"Mr. Renshall took them. He is a clergyman, and rather a particular friend of Miss Jardine's."

Lady Thanet and her husband sailed by, receiving from Lady Wharfedale, and returning her, especially the lady, a very distant bend.

"Mr. Percy Mulgrave is rather an intimate friend of Maitland's, is he not?" enquired Wyversley.

"So it is commonly reported. He is probably hoping to transform his Under-Secretaryship into a seat in the new Cabinet."

"Is he—why? He is generally considered a noodle. What has he done?" enquired Wyversley.

"Do you ask why?" said Avondale. "Has he not married—well—his present wife? and is she

not the most intriguing woman in England, Lady Barnet not excepted? And as to his being a noodle, Wyversley, why, you must be aware that if Maitland is to be Premier he will have ability enough for the whole Ministry, and will rather seek colleagues without such a qualification."

"Slandering again, Mr. Avondale," said the Marchioness.

"And am I not correct?" rejoined the offender.

"There is Mr. FitzHenry, Reginald. He won't look this way; go and tell him where to find me."

Wyversley went off on his errand as fast as the press would allow him.

"He has splendid talents and abilities. My husband says he will certainly be Lord Chancellor. He is a most persuasive speaker—I have heard him once or twice. I must introduce you."

"You are very kind, but I do not think I need trouble you."

"What! You acquainted with them too? You seem to know almost every one. I have seen you nodding to at least fifty people this

afternoon. Here is Mr. Jardine making his way back again."

"I must apologise," said that gentleman. "But we became separated suddenly, I don't know how; though I trust Mr. Avondale has not failed to enliven you—he is a capital entertainer."

"You are as bad as Wyversley, sir; though, in consideration of your great effort last night, I presume I must be lenient."

Wyversley now returned with Mr. FitzHenry, and for some minutes much badinage went flying about. Mr. Jardine especially received the lawyer's compliments on his speech. He was ironically asked what would be his next proceedings—whether he had yet received the Queen's command; and, if so, whether all the offices were yet filled up.

The subject took it all in good-humour, but declared he was not altogether responsible for it. His young friend had been to some extent the originator of his action; and to him some of the credit or the blame, whichever might be awarded, must be attributed.

"Mr. Avondale again!" exclaimed the Mar-

chioness. "He appears to be a perfect genius."

"We shall have him, some fine day," added FitzHenry, "astonishing the whole world, like the bursting forth of a brilliant star. Speaking seriously, however, we must get him into Parliament, if possible. And why do you not turn your attention to politics?"

"So I suppose I shall, some day," said Wyversley; "but who, when such scenes as this tempt him from work, would choose to immure himself within the walls of a Senate House?"

Once again the conversation turned to the company around. It was, indeed, a fascinating scene—one that would have withdrawn a hermit from his cell, or a saint from his oratory. Each felt and accepted the influence of its attractions; each gave himself unreservedly up to enjoyment. So the time flew by. When Lady Wharfedale withdrew, Avondale acknowledged that he had spent a most delightful day; and he could not doubt that he had made the impression he had laboured to do.

CHAPTER XII.

SUNDAY came and passed—a *dies non* as far as open negotiation was concerned, but none the less actively was it carried on in secret. Political plotting knows neither time nor place, neither pause nor stop. Those engaged in it can scarcely venture to snatch a moment's breathing time, much less to relinquish their efforts, even for an instant. The fight is too close, the combatants too well 'matched. Hand to hand the struggle goes on continuously, each side carefully watching for an opening, each eager to take full advantage of the slightest weakness of an opponent, each ready, on the least appearance of faltering, to charge home. Were it not thus, whence were the interest derived? 'Tis not the overthrow of a miserable obstructor that the true soldier seeks for. What satisfaction, what enjoyment, springs from such a success? When the odds are all against one, when approved foes with-

stand, when the battle is for the reins of our country's government, and when our fellow-citizens are looking on—then it is the nerves are strengthened, the courage excited to its highest point, and the real manhood of a man tested. Victory in such a contest affords unqualified pleasure, defeat is hardly less glorious.

On all hands, it was clear that a crisis had arisen, and as yet but the vaguest opinions and guesses were put forth as to how it would end. Nothing definite could yet be known. The two or three Sunday journals, never, fortunately, in this country, of much consideration, had not been able to add much to the general information. They could report that a Council, attended by all the Cabinet, had yesterday been held in Downing Street, and that was all—a fact of which everybody had become well aware on the previous evening. People had no resource but to proceed to their customary places of worship, and to moderate their impatience till at least the next day.

Avondale usually attended the Temple Church. In religion, as in politics, he held very mixed ideas. Creeds he thoroughly discountenanced,

true piety he as thoroughly respected. Yet as he upheld the necessity, at least in the present state of advancement and morality of the human race, of a national form of worship, he saw no means of abolishing articles of faith and doctrine. He had been brought up as an orthodox Churchman by his father, who had ever been attached to the Church of England, though, apart from prior impressions, he had, from genuine love for the purity and simplicity of her formularies and from deep conviction in the excellence of her influence, become a firm, not blind, adherent of her. A cathedral service he admired; but for the childish mummeries and the wretched vagaries of the Ritualists he ever expressed profound contempt. Indeed, if he felt greater dislike of the Romish religion herself, it was only because he considered it at bottom political, and not merely theological, because he not only loathed but dreaded the spread of its doctrines, because all history told him that, like a polluting upas tree, it had blasted and withered every country in which it had been planted, and because he imagined—needlessly, perhaps—that of late years it had showed increased vitality in his own land.

Liberal as were his views on matters of belief, yet with the sickening cant which, under the shade of similar liberality, pretends to discard all varieties of faith as being derogatory to the greatness of human intellect, and sets up in its stead a license of thought tenfold more degrading even than Romish bigotry or sanctimonious Puritanism—with this he had not the slightest sympathy.

Many reasons concurred to make him an attendant at the Temple Church. The building itself is a magnificent edifice, carrying one's thoughts back many centuries in the course of time. Few, or none, ever enter it without being affected by its imposing grandeur, its awe-inspiring solemnity, its subdued solitude. The shades of the dead seem even now to be flitting about. The crusaders who are buried in it, the preachers who have filled its pulpit, the generations of jurists who have worshipped there, all in turn pass before the mind's eye. Remembrance of the past never fails to arouse some emotions in the mind of even the most unimpressible; and here the very service smacks of antiquity—the bidding prayer for “God’s

blessing on all seminaries of learning and especially on the two Temples," the locking of the doors after the anthem, the collection of hymns and anthems, the mellow organ, all remind us of times gone by. Avondale never entered this house of God without experiencing a removal from the occupations of every-day life, and never left it without acknowledging the soothing effects of its calmness and repose.

CHAPTER XIII.

MONDAY and Tuesday followed—Ministerial flittings backward and forward—this every one knew as well as the papers—but nothing definitely settled.

Tuesday evening, Avondale, with his three friends, Jardine, Wyversley, and Talbot, according to their arrangement, paid a visit to the Clair Street Maison d'Or. Clair Street is just off Regent Street, with which it is parallel, and with which it is connected by a narrow thoroughfare. It is itself out of the route of cabs and omnibuses; and, not being much frequented by foot passengers, it wears a look of quietness and respectability.

As they were going to it, Jardine enquired of Avondale how it was that such a well-known gaming-house could exist under the present law?

“My dear fellow, you must not ask incon-

venient questions. I do not know much about it. Jackson keeps it as quiet as he can ; and the outside has such an irreproachable air that none not in the secret would have the least suspicion."

"I suppose not. I have often been down the street, but have not the least idea which is the house."

"Very probably. And as to the police, you must be aware that 3s. 6d. a day is not a very large sum wherewith to secure the honesty of a heterogeneous body of men."

They passed by a chemist's shop, and entered a tobacconist's situated next. No one but the attendant was in it. He knew both Talbot and Avondale ; and, after a few words from these, admitted them into a small room leading out of the shop. Here they found another person, lazily scanning the evening paper. Another explanation, and they passed into a dark passage ; but, as the door closed behind them, a bell rang, at the further end apparently, and a lamp, revolving, threw a clear, brilliant light upon them

Stepping down the passage, Avondale stopped under the light which came through an oval

piece of glass, fitted near the ceiling, in the top of what seemed to be a door. He turned a handle, the light again disappeared, leaving them in darkness, and the door opened. A gloomy-looking room was before them. Into it they entered, Talbot placing three crowns in the hands of a dissipated-looking individual, who acted as doorkeeper. Another room received them; and for a few minutes Jardine felt half-blinded by the glare of many lights. It was a long chamber, of considerable height and width, shaped like the letter L, being much wider at one end, and for two-thirds of the way down, than at the other. On all the walls were full-length mirrors, reflecting again and again every figure that fell on them. From the ceiling, which was superbly decorated, hung three enormous chandeliers, containing from thirty to forty burners each; and under each was placed a fine mahogany table. By the walls were fixed luxurious couches; and on them, between the pier glasses, were fastened engravings and paintings of a fair degree of excellence. The whole appearance struck Jardine with astonishment, which his eyes plainly expressed.

“Mon cher ami, comment le trouvez-vous?”
said Avondale.

“I—I hardly can say. But I certainly had not the least idea such places were still to be found in London.”

“Charming innocence. A good number of fellows here, too.”

“Yes, the Derby, to-morrow, is partly the cause. Not a few are, probably, country cousins.”

The room was well filled, all the tables being occupied. One of them was devoted to roulette, another to rouge et noir, and the third, which stood back by itself, to cards and dice. Many of those present Jardine recognised, and several who were disengaged came forward to welcome him and Avondale.

“Thought, Avondale, you had gone out of the world,” drawled the Honourable Stanley Carlton, an empty-headed son of as empty-headed a father.

“Don’t tell crams, Carlton. You find thinking such a labour, that I am sure I should never be the subject of it.”

“Going to give me my revenge at billiards

to-night?" asked a youth with good-humoured, plebeian face. "It is seven or eight weeks since you gave me that beating."

He was the eldest son of Mr. Richard Hardman, one of our coal and iron millionaires. Mr. Hardman had worked his way from "Dick," the odd-boy at the colliery, who cleaned the office, ran on errands, and did a hundred others jobs at fourpence a day, to be Richard Hardman, Esq., C.E., M.P. for Coalford, of which borough he owned half the houses, and employed nine-tenths of the voters. He had iron-works and coal-mines in the North of England and in South Wales; he had made two or three branch railway lines, but preferred to turn out from his works the rolling stock by which the traffic is carried on. He had commenced life as a Radical, but, like all men when they make a fortune, he was now a Tory, and was gravitating towards a baronetcy. Wishing his son to go into good society, he allowed him unlimited supplies of money for that purpose, and the young man dutifully carried out his desires, at least to the extent of spending his wealth.

To his question Avondale replied that he

would be happy to join in a game with him presently if a table were vacant ; and to Talbot, who interposed with—

“ Don’t forget your engagement to me ”—

“ No ! of course not ; I am too fond of your sovs, Talbot, to miss the opportunity of plucking you.”

“ That you, Avondale ? ” asked a young man, about his own age—Aubrey, Marquis of Brayclift, a young nobleman, early left, like Wyversley, an orphan, and now far on the road along which the Earl was proposing to follow. “ That you, Avondale ? It sounds like your voice, and very much like your cheek. When are you going to pluck Talbot ? ”

“ Directly ; come and watch. Perhaps you could give me a hint how the operation is best and most expeditiously performed.”

Several laughed, but Brayclift took the allusion in good part.

“ I feel the operation, Avondale ; but really cannot tell how it is performed. I was never curious to investigate the process. Perhaps Tom Lewis could elucidate the difficulty ? ”

Lewis had been smiling at Avondale’s reply ;

there was now a more general and a louder laugh at his expense, for he was one of those waifs and strays of society who, though not exactly blacklegs, are obliged to eke out a subsistence by utilising the follies and the indiscretions of other men.

“Jardine too!” continued Brayclift. “You ought to know better than this. I am almost inclined to ask you if your revered parent knows you are out.”

“Don’t trouble about him, Stuart,” said Avondale; “he has got a few thousands on Star of Dawn, and is overjoyed because she has gone down only from 3 to 1 to 10 to 1. As a rule, he lays when it’s 2 to 1 on, and a week or so later the odds are 20 to 1 against. Is not that the case, Brayclift? Come on, Stuart. The billiard-tables are down in the lower regions, in order that the click of the balls may not be heard in the street.”

“There! how do you like the look?”

The room they had reached was somewhat longer than the chamber overhead, and it was the full width all the way down. Eight tables were in it, two fine branch gaseliers hanging

over each, the whole of the light being thrown by proper shades on the tables, all of which were then occupied.

“The very man,” exclaimed a voice, as Avondale entered. “Here, Avondale, what am I to do? I am forty-six; Grey two behind. Look at those balls and at mine—all three in a line, and Grey is sure to run out next hand.”

“Pot the red, and screw off it to the cushion, and back and kiss white.”

“Pot the red! What next? And whoever heard of screwing from one side of the table to the other?”

“My dear Wyversley, don’t first ask advice and then grumble at it. If you can’t do that, play off the first ball against the farther cushion, then to the side below the middle pocket, back here, and then back to the second ball. But that is all round the world to Westminster, and is, besides, much harder.”

“Fair play, Avondale,” objected Grey. “Don’t coach him too much.”

“The advice, I fear, is thrown away,” said his opponent; “but here goes.”

He made a careful shot; the ball followed as if

by instinct the route marked out by Avondale, and finally cannoned, while a shout of applause rewarded coach and pupil. But the latter could do no more, both balls being under the cushion. He merely knocked one out for Grey, who was thus enabled to win.

Avondale and Hardman played the next game, which soon ended in favour of the former, as did the succeeding one between Avondale and Talbot. Hardman would then try again, but asked for twenty, out of a hundred.

“You gave it me last time, but I thought I was improved now.”

“Give him thirty,” said Wyversley.

“If you will recoup me in case of defeat.”

“Willingly, if Hardman will make it a fiver.”

The stakes were deposited. Hardman gave the miss, and Avondale wiped off fifteen.

“Well done, well done!” exclaimed Wyversley.

“Make it a tener, Hardman?”

This was assented to. Hardman added two, and Avondale ten. Then the former had several good breaks, and the latter bad ones, till the score was eighty-five to sixty, when Avondale, by fine play, made it even. Hardman increased

his to ninety, and left his own ball under the cushion one side, the red one nearly opposite, just above the middle pocket, and Avondale's in baulk.

"Throw' up the sponge, Avondale," said Grey, "a crown you don't score."

"Make it sovs?"

"No; but I will lay a single one."

"Good."

Avondale's ball just touched the red one, passed on gently to the cushion, and, hugging it closely, rolled on to the corner pocket.

"You deserve that sov," said Grey, handing it over. "I bet any one else the same coin he wins; or I will take two to one he wins off this break."

"Done," exclaimed Brayclift; "two to one."

The red ball had rolled back a little more in front of the middle pocket.

"You can't screw it in," said Brayclift, "unless there is magic in your cue."

Avondale played sharp. The red ball rebounded from the cushion into the opposite middle pocket, while his own, impinging from the end of the table, cannoned against his oppo-

ment's. The onlookers were astounded. A few more strokes and Grey had pocketed his two sovereigns.

"I'll take 3 to 1," said Brayclift, "that Avondale beats Hardman, giving him two strokes to one."

"I'll give 5 to 2," said Hardman.

"Taken."

"I go you halves, Brayclift," said Avondale.

The game was short. Avondale had but four breaks. The first took him to twenty-seven, the next to sixty-one, including thirteen cannons; the next to seventy-three, and the fourth out, Hardman being just ten behind. A quartett was next formed; Stuart Jardine and Wyversley against Talbot and Brayclift. That over, Avondale and Jardine went up-stairs again. The room now was crowded even more than before. Gambling of every description was in full swing; the dice-boxes kept up a constant rattle; by the roulette table was wedged a ring of eager gazers; in all directions bets were freely being made upon the coming race. All were talking loudly, most were in that peculiar state known as a "little fresh."

Jardine was somewhat amused at the scene.

“ Cambridge and old Rablyn’s slightly heightened,” suggested Avondale.

“ Very like it, save that his rooms were but a very tenth-rate imitation of this. How the place is crammed !”

“ Rather too much so—more than I have ever seen here before. It is rather risky admitting so many.”

“ So I should imagine. Half of these fellows are thoroughly tight, but they are betting wild and playing high. It’s ‘youth at the prow and pleasure—’ ”

“ The devil, you mean, ‘at the helm.’ Hardly one fellow you see here but is born to either a noble name or wealth that his father has scraped together—is this the life, the training, think you, to fit them for the work destined for them? Look at those we left below—Brayclift, Talbot, Hardman, a sapient trio. Look at that classic face ; do you know its owner?—the only son of his mother, Mrs. Wardelle, the end of his line. That youth away in the corner, with three others round him—do you know him? A Duke in whose veins flows the blood of two royal houses—Our

Right Trusty and Right Entirely Well-beloved Cousin Glenlivet. Pah! there will be a mighty upheaving within a year or two, which will rid us of Right Trustys and Beloveds, and other such Humbugs, and few will regret the riddance."

"Well, Walter," exclaimed Jardine and Wyversley, who heard the end of the speech, laughing, "you are perfectly incomprehensible. You come here and grumble at others who do the same, and that you cannot aver that their motives are altogether unlike your own. May not a man once or twice in the year blow off steam without thereby incurring your righteous indignation?"

"Never mind. We won't argue the matter now. I will some other evening, if you like. Let's join in here—some have, apparently, just finished. Can you find room for us, Dawson?" addressing that gentleman, who was shuffling a pack of cards given up by the party leaving the table. They soon arranged themselves, tried several games in succession, till Avondale rose.

"I object to late hours, Stuart—let's be off—it's past one."

Wyversley came with them.

“What has made you leave so early?” asked Avondale, astonished.

“The charm of your company, my dear fellow.”

“Dear me—very flattering. Going to Epsom, of course, to-morrow? Any one with you?”

“Stansville.”

“Stansville? I did not know he was in town. By the by, Glenlivet was looking somewhat glum.”

“Very probable. He has gone in heavily on Star of Dawn, and, pending the race, thinks of turning his house in Scotland into a joint-stock distillery, and of migrating for a term to Hongkong or Nova Zembla.”

“Wish him luck, but he had better wait till next year, and Brayclift will be ready to be his *compagnon de voyage*.”

“I wonder you did not add myself. I have been let in for £5,000 by Star of Dawn, but I hope to recoup a little of it.”

CHAPTER XIV.

WEDNESDAY came, and brought with it some positive information as to the Government. The Earl of Garmouth and the Marquis of Wharfedale had resigned—so much was certain. The former was, of course, to be succeeded by Mr. Maitland, but it appeared not yet settled who should fill the latter's post. The "Times" mentioned Lord Tintern as the most likely candidate. He was the eldest son of the Earl of Usk, had been in Parliament a dozen years, and was at present one of the Under-Secretaries for the Home Department. This was also the choice of the "Morning Mercury," while the poor "Constitutional" contented itself with asserting that "incapable as the Marquis had been, he, probably, was superior to any one remaining in the Liberal ranks."

This appointment filled up, there was a still more dubious question to be decided—the Home

Office. This is a department more exacting than any other in its claims on the person filling it. He finds it simply impossible to please everybody. He is constantly in direct contact at innumerable points with his fellow-subjects, and therefore cannot, by the most careful steering, keep clear of all offence. He is, too, in many respects, a most anomalous individual. Though void of all legal training, he has to act in criminal cases as a final court of appeal—an arrangement peculiar to our English Constitution. In matters concerning police, the preservation of the public peace, and so on, he is a species of dictator. Maitland had discharged his duties pretty fairly to the general satisfaction, though not a few of his decisions seemed to have been arrived at after a process of deliberation familiarly known as “tossing.” Who should follow him? The “Times” said Sir George Edmunds. He had been an excellent President of the Colonial Board, had had long experience in administration, and was endowed with many of the qualifications peculiarly requisite for the office to which it was proposed to transfer him.

True enough, but it would be equally difficult

to replace him, and our connections at that period with the Colonies were in a delicate state. The "Mercury" could not form any idea on the subject; it "merely chronicled a rumour that Mr. C. Wilkins Arundel, at present Under-Secretary for War, would be promoted to a seat in the Cabinet, and that he would be succeeded by the Honble. Mordaunt Tracy, already well known for his experience at various courts on the Continent." The "Constitutional" knew nothing, and troubled less, about the appointment; but "as doubtless, in any Ministry presided over by Mr. Maitland, incapacity and obstinacy would be amply rewarded, they presumed that Mr. Percy Mulgrave would be removed from the Foreign Office to the vacancy." This paper also gave free circulation to the report, passed over in silence by both its contemporaries, that the Lord Chancellor and the Attorney-General would decline to retain their posts; and it contained a doleful lament on the destruction that was impending over Holy Church, if its bishops should die off while the nomination of fresh ones lay in Mr. Maitland's hands.

"Rather a remarkable coincidence," ruminated

Avondale, "the one Tracy named yesterday for a bishopric, the other to-day for office. It may be nothing more, but he would doubt it. And what has suddenly become of our friend Sloe? He has all at once dropped out of notice."

He got a copy of the "Pioneer," the organ of that personage's party. He found an article on the topic he wished, but it contained little news. It congratulated Mr. Maitland on having at length achieved the goal of his desires; trusted that he would take every opportunity of associating with him men of ability and enlightenment, and that they would labour earnestly to increasing the welfare of the land; then went into an account of the various measures requiring immediate attention; and finally wound up by saying that numbers would be rejoiced to hear that Mr. Jonathan Sloe was in favour of the new Government, though they feared that, from his proclaimed dislike to fettering himself, he would hesitate to submit to the trammels of office. Altogether it was very moderate, compared with the usual tone of its productions.

But the second leader more than compensated

for its want of ferocity. This, supplemental, apparently, to one of the preceding day, was a bitter, uncompromising, malignant attack on the Church. The career of the late Bishop of Doncaster supplied it with a text—as, indeed, it well might—but its abuse went even beyond the bounds of decency. Making no allowance for the very many excellent divines in the Church, taking not the slightest notice of what in times past it has done for the greatness of this country, it hurled at it every charge that sectarian malice or a renegade's venom could devise, characterising its ritual as a farce, and its doctrine as a stigma on the science of the day, styling its dignitaries political time-servers, and its inferior ministers ignorant bigots, and declaring it to be the great stumbling-stone in the way of improvement and progress.

“Quite enough for one issue,” thought Avondale. “If Sloe does get into the Ministry, and those are his sentiments, the Scarlet Lady of England may begin to put her house in order; though it is doubtful which is the more certain mode of attack, open and unreserved like this, or

insidious and in secret, by raising such men as Tracy to high positions in it."

His musings were interrupted by Stuart Jardine and two other fellows bursting into the room to know if he were ready for the race.

CHAPTER XV.

THE morning had opened cloudy, and had not yet cleared up, but as the day promised to be free from anything more than passing showers, there was every probability that the Derby, especially as it was so late in May, would be attended by its usual crowds. Avondale went down in Mr. Jardine's drag, Stuart and four friends, with a servant, making up the party. He mounted the box with Mr. Jardine, and thus obtained a better view of the mass of vehicles and horses, with their drivers and riders, moving towards Epsom as fast as the crush would allow them.

It is somewhat strange that a man of Mr. Jardine's calibre and temperament should join in the rush and bustle and excitement incidental to a racecourse, but he held that one may fairly now and then relax from the stiffness of common every-day life; that a person might occasionally throw off his dignity, and lay aside his cares and

ambition, without thereby compromising his position, or forfeiting his self-respect. The Derby, however, he considered scarcely a fitting scene for his wife or daughters—and he was not far wrong.

. There is in human nature, and especially in Anglo-Saxon nature, a tendency to roughness and grossness, which, repressed generally in accordance with the teachings of civilisation, and the requirements of society, will, on occasions like these, burst forth with redoubled virulence. Saddening is the fact, and degrading the avowal, that with all nations, but especially with some more than others, freshness of spirits too often degenerates into coarseness of action, lightness of speech into still more lightness of thought.

Whence arises the fact? Is it that bodily and mentally the bad is inherent, the good but a graft? One is almost driven to the conclusion that vice and evil are the all-prevailing principle of nature, and that virtue, and purity, and light are but a derogation from the pre-arranged order of the universe. However, be that as it may, assign what reason we like for it, seek whatever explanation we choose, the fact remains patent

that at all meetings for allowing unrestrained intercourse, highly-flavoured tales are told and listened to with the greatest gusto, and indecent jokes arouse the loudest laughter. Too often the language and manners are such as absolutely to prevent the presence of ladies.

Thus it was that none of the gentler sex accompanied Mr. Jardine. And, though he attended the race, he never, save with here and there an associate, betted. He asserted the turf to be a hotbed of cheating and trickery; he looked on those who obtained their living by it as, without exception, knaves and rogues, and he had not a much better opinion of those of his own class who made it the occupation of their life; and, therefore, while willing to derive a day's amusement from the concourse of the thousands that yearly cover Epsom Downs, he never kept a horse, or otherwise patronised the sport.

They recognised many of their friends on their way. Half the members of both Houses of the Legislature were taking a day's release from their labours, as well as several members of the Government, careless of the uncertain position

they were in. Wyversley passed them near the downs, in his drag, with two or three men about his own age.

Some time later, in an open carriage, came Auricoma, and another beauty of the same class, as good-looking almost, perhaps, as herself, but decidedly less attractive. Mr. Jardine noticed them—

“What a fine woman that is, Walter! Pity she was not something else. If Wyversley does not take care she will certainly entrap him. He seems infatuated—you must try to save him from total destruction.”

They reached the course—but what need, what avails it, to attempt anew a description? It is a scene beyond a writer's power to reproduce, and must be viewed to be comprehended. It passes man's imagination to conceive from a mere narration. The rows of carriages extended mile on mile, the pushing, heaving, sweltering mob, the constant roar, now sinking into a half-subdued hum, now rising into a deafening din, the grand stand and the sea of heads that fills it, the tents that dot the heath, the cloud that on a shiny day overhangs it—words would fail to

depicture them. It is England's carnival. There, for once in the year, are drawn together all classes and grades—the peer forsakes his club, the merchant tears himself from his counting-house and the banker from his desk, the lawyer abandons his clients and the doctor his patients, the shopkeeper ventures to leave his business, and the artisan to put by his tools.

“For once in the year”—heaven grant it may not become oftener! Nothing more surely marks the degradation of a people than their abandonment to unseemly delights. Nothing more distinctly serves as an index to a nation's character than the pleasures to which they devote themselves. As long as a country's distinctive diversions are of a manly, elevating cast, so long will a healthful tone, in thought and in action, prevail in it. But change this—let its students, its traders, its labourers once begin to seek relief from their especial occupations by indulging in sensuous delights, and in even more animal enjoyment, and it will speedily sink into and be utterly whelmed in the pool of infamy into which it has deliberately plunged itself.

Thus has it ever been, but nowhere is the lesson to be read more clearly than in the annals of Rome. We may not—probably it will be said we cannot—follow in her footsteps, but we may easily walk beside them. The Circus cannot be re-established—it would be shocking. Ten or twenty pairs of criminals matched weekly in Hyde Park against savage animals from the Zoological Society's gardens would be a show that modern "civilisation" could not tolerate.

But it does tolerate evils quite as hideous, though not, perhaps, as pronounced. The ghastly procession that, night after night, year in, year out, flaunts up and down our principal streets is far more sickening than was ever a "game" in the Roman amphitheatre; and the never-ending fight which the unhappy mortals composing it have to carry on for bare existence, is far more one-sided than was ever struggle between Dacian Gladiator and Parthian tiger. Oh! my country, my country, wilt thou never purge thyself from this plague-spot? It is eating into thy very vitals, it is poisoning thy life's blood; a day will come when thou wilt bitterly lament thy heedlessness of thy unfortunate

children. God help them, the miserable victims of thy sins and cruelty, and help thee too, the still more wretched criminal.

Mr. Jardine's drag was soon besieged by acquaintances, some to talk with himself, others to chat with those who had accompanied him. Avondale seized the first opportunity for leaving, and made his way round to where he thought Wyversley would be. He easily found him. Many who did, and still more who did not know the party, were gazing at Auricoma's carriage and its occupants; but his lordship was smiling and chatting, with supreme contempt for the opinions or observations of those about him.

He received Avondale with a glad welcome, and introduced Auricoma—he had never yet spoken to her—to him as Miss Violet Erle, and her companion as Mrs. St. John Brooksley. The former evidently considered him one whose good favour was worth gaining, and she put on her handsomest looks. She was very sparkling and amusing, her conversation and remarks on the scene around distinguished her as a person whose endowments went farther than her pretty face, and Avondale comprehended more clearly than

before the fascination under which his friend lay.

“Do you care much for racing, Mr. Avondale?”

“No, not a bit, but I like to see the people that come together on a day like this. Look what an immense multitude it is. You could walk on their heads for a mile straight before us.”

“Yes,” assented Stansville, one of those who had come down with Wyversley. “There was a frightful squash on the road. Thought several times we should get smashed up.”

“But you did not seem to trouble much; at least, not when we saw you,” said Auricoma.

“Oh, no—what is the good of troubling your brains about anything of the sort? If you are pitched out, there is no help for it—better take it easy.”

“Was not aware before, Stanse,” put in Wyversley, “that you laid claim to the possession of brains. I was under the impression that you considered them a totally unnecessary part of your organisation—the less one has of them the better for his general comfort.”

“Yes, that is about it. I can’t see the need of a fellow sweating and bothering like Avondale, in the absurd belief that people will think a rap more of you for trying to benefit them.”

“You are very philosophical to-day, Mr. Stansville,” said Auricoma.

“You need not tell him so,” objected Wyversley; “compliments are wasted on him—better try Avondale.”

“I hardly know what to say to Mr. Avondale—I hear so much about him;” whereupon that gentleman bowed very lowly in acknowledgment.

“Ah, you should have seen him at billiards last night, Herb. You are a pretty good hand, but I think Hardman is almost your match. Well, Walter beat him three times running, a hundred up, the first time even, the second giving him thirty, the last giving him two strokes to one. In this game he made off one break thirteen cannons, three of them with both balls touching the sides.”

“Oh, Reginald, you must get him to come and play me,” said Auricoma.

“What do you say to it?” asked Wyversley.

"You won't be so unpolite as to refuse a lady, or to beat her."

"I shall be most delighted, but Miss Erle may rely that I shall certainly be so ungallant as to try my best to win."

"By the by, who were with you, Avondale?" inquired Stansville. "Was not young Powercourt one?"

"Yes."

"I thought I remembered him. What sort of a fellow is he now? He was with me at Harrow—somewhat of a cad then, and pretty much of a coward."

"He is considerably altered—nothing much now, but he is at least a gentleman. I dare say the three years at Cambridge knocked the nonsense out of him. But he was some years younger than you, and perhaps you looked upon him as more timid than he was."

"Likely enough. There is another fellow I have lost sight of since I left Harrow. Osbert—did you know him? He went to St. John's. He was the best company one could come across. Three of them were there together, John and William Osbert, and their half-brother Robert

Hood. Their names brought on them a good deal of chaffing, as they were generally called Robin Hood, Little John, and William Fitz-Osbert, in allusion to some Radicals, forerunners of Sloe, I suppose, who lived goodness knows when. I mean John—William died one Long—did you meet him?”

“A few times. He was pretty much liked, but he went to the bad—got into the worst set at St. John’s, and that is about the worst set you could pick out in the ’varsity. I saw, however, that he was ordained the other day.”

“If you two would kindly shut up about your school days,” interrupted Wyversley, “and favour the company generally, we should feel obliged.”

“Very sorry—hope Miss Erle won’t be too hard upon one,” apologised Avondale.

“Not at all. I was enjoying your recollections of the past. I should very much like to see Cambridge.”

“Better say Oxford, Violet,” put in Wyversley; “that is worth going to.”

“Oh, yes, of course,” laughed Avondale. “Every one thinks his own University the best. But, see, they are clearing the course.”

“It is only for one of the smaller canters,” said Stansville.

“I have been here longer than I intended,” said Avondale. “I must be going back to Mr. Jardine; it was rather cool of me to leave him, but I was very anxious to make the acquaintance of your fair friends, Wyversley.”

And thereupon he took his departure, notwithstanding repeated requests to stay at least till they had had lunch.

The remainder of the day varied in nothing from other occasions. The races succeeded in due order. Some lost; Wyversley a considerable sum, Brayclift a small fortune, and one or two of the same lot nearly their all. Others won; Avondale to the extent of a £5 note, which exactly covered the gloves he had also won from various young ladies, but for which they most unjustifiably made him pay. The mob shouted themselves hoarse, half the spectators got drunk, and so the proceedings ended in the usual riot and uproar.

CHAPTER XVI.

THURSDAY! the eventful day which would herald publicly the transfer of the Premiership to another occupant, and would thus mark another period in England's story. The papers had very little fresh news for their readers. Failing this, they gladly recorded all the fleeting rumours, and launched out into speculations anent the policy of the future Government.

Hitherto one gentleman's name had been rather unaccountably overlooked. This was Richard Rowe's. He was one of the most noticeable men of the day, and his career might fairly point a moral. A splendid classic, better even than the new Premier himself, he had in early life, after taking a high degree at Oxford, passed some years as Professor of Latin, at University College, London. There the love of equality innate in him and strengthened by deep study of the master writers of antiquity, received a deeper

tinge from the advanced Liberalism which hung round that institution. Thus he became one of the strangest outgrowths characterising the time, a philosophical Republican—a man who from principle objected to aristocracies, and from conviction and reasoning despised the many-headed mob; who, from hatred of every species of coercion, opposed all religious establishments, and yet, forgetful of the lessons of history, was simple enough to believe that a political watchword or a social cry could take the place of a religious creed; who appreciated, as few save himself could appreciate, the poets and historians and philosophers of Greece and Rome, and yet condemned the perusal of their works as a means of education, and would banish them from the category of a school or college course; who would blot out every aspiration and aim of man beyond the mere living from day to day, and yet dreaded to extend political power to those of his fellows who were without those aspirations and aims.

He was a Stoic preaching cosmopolitanism, and despising all inferior to himself in intellect or determination; setting forth as the great ideal

the "Wise Man," and destroying the only method of attaining to that ideal; declaring true happiness to consist in the exercise of the mental powers, and maintaining in all its nakedness the principle of general utility. He was an Epicurean who had a thorough contempt for the allurements of pleasure and ease. He was a Conservative, who stamped upon every Conservative dogma; a Radical, who reviled demagogues.

His professorship he exchanged for a seat on the Executive Council of New South Wales. While there, Mr. Jardine made his acquaintance. They became good friends, though as often differing as agreeing on matters of policy. Both were men distinctive of their age and time. Both had had a very varied experience. The one, a descendant of Highland chiefs, semi-savage scarce two centuries back, had received no education in the least degree comparable with Rowe's, but, gifted with sterling sound sense and resolution, had fought his way upwards to a position of great influence, and was looking forward to a still higher rank; the other, come of the English middle-class, sprung from an ancestry of manufacturers and clergymen, had undergone a totally

different training, which had, however, brought him to the same goal. The former urged the admission of all men to equal rights and privileges as a necessary corrective for the ineradicable viciousness of human nature; the latter as energetically upheld the same doctrine as being demanded by the inherent goodness of mankind.

From New South Wales, Rowe returned to England a year or two before Mr. Jardine. His writings and his peculiar views had already acquired celebrity for him, and soon secured him a seat in our House of Commons; and then his brilliant oratory and his fluency of debate, within an even shorter period, compelled the Government to ensure his support by putting him into office.

With the Earl of Garmouth's predecessor, however, he could not agree, and he had, consequently, been for the last three or four years unemployed, but the enforced rest had increased, rather than diminished, his influence in Parliament. The "Times" of this morning declared that he would be a most desirable addition to Mr. Maitland's Cabinet; the "Mercury" spoke somewhat to the same effect, though not so plainly.

In fact, it was a question between Rowe the scholar, and Sloe the demagogue. Each was an advanced Liberal, but of very different views, and each had spoken very hard things of the other—in particular the demagogue, always headstrong and indiscreet, often ill-judging and unjust, had on one memorable occasion attacked his more polished compatriot in a strain that could never be forgotten, and barely be forgiven. It was this which seemed to raise a bar to their association, and which prevented Maitland's journal giving a clear expression on the matter.

The evening came, the House was thronged with members and strangers, but the public curiosity was not satisfied. Maitland made but a short speech. After the vote of Friday last, the Earl of Garmouth had considered it incumbent on him to tender to the Queen his resignation. In so doing, he had informed her Majesty that he did not consider the defeat as in the least subversive of the principles of the Liberal Government, and therefore advised her to entrust him (the speaker) with the formation of the new Ministry. This honour he had received. One or two necessary changes would, of course, have to

be made, but they would only slightly affect the constitution of the Cabinet. The chief would be in the appointment of a new Lord Chancellor. Lord Brentford having now filled that office some years, had expressed a wish to be relieved from it. The other alterations were comparatively unimportant, but as they were not yet complete, and as he would, of course, be expected to enunciate the future policy of the Cabinet, he deemed it requisite to ask an adjournment till Monday week, when all the re-arrangements would, he hoped, be finished.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE Marchioness of Wharfedale's reception was tame, compared with the generality of such occasions. Less than the usual number of invitations had been issued, and more than the usual number of defaults had occurred. This was owing chiefly to the state of political parties, there being several parliamentary dinners that same evening; but it gave Avondale a better opportunity for securing the ear of her ladyship. She kept him near her during the earlier part of the evening, and introduced him to the most eligible parties.

"The Duke and Duchess of Cheshire" were announced, and the illustrious pair sailed by; the Duke, a thin, wizened man, about 5ft. 2in. high, who took the longest steps his legs allowed him, and tried to look very fierce; his wife, a stout, pompous woman, six inches taller.

"Their Graces," whispered Avondale, "seem

wonderfully proud of their new title. What they have received it for—I suppose it is a partnership affair—is a mystery to every one. I suppose Garmouth wished to clear off old scores. But, at least, they might have had the good manners not to have encroached on the Earl of Chester.”

“Sir Brian Boru and Lady Boru.” The last pair had received but a cold salutation; these were dismissed with a dignified bend, though Avondale’s smothered ejaculation of “Oh, Jemima !” in reference to the lady’s Christian name, very nearly upset her ladyship’s gravity.

They were popularly known as the Bear and his leader. Sir Brian was an Irishman, poor as St. Patrick, irascible as a turkey-cock, and not over good-looking, having a shock head of red hair, with moustache and whiskers of the same hue, and little grey twinkling eyes. Lady Jemima was the eldest daughter of a fashionable linen-draper in Regent Street; tall, thin, bony; eyes slightly wandering, and teeth very much so; nose small, but mouth and ears making up for what that prominent feature lacked in size.

“Sir George Edmunds and Lady Edmunds”—

on whom the Marchioness bestowed a smile and a few words of salutation.

“Mr. and Mrs. Greenham Softhead”—a slight smile.

“Has not Mr. Softhead the reputation of being a very amiable man?” asked Avondale.

“Yes, of course. Why?”

“A few years ago, four men at the Temple agreed to dine together, each to invite the most disagreeable person he knew, the names not to be told to each other, lest either might object to his friend’s guest as being especially objectionable, beyond even the limits of their wager. Covers were laid for eight, but only five came—the fifth being Mr. Greenham Softhead, of surly notoriety—each had made the same choice.”

“Oh, Mr. Avondale, it is quite a slander—you are a thorough scandal-monger.”

“He is, of course, altered now. That was before his marriage, and when he was unknown to your ladyship. The one event, doubtless, commenced his improvement, the other must have completed it, had his ill-temper been ten times as inveterate.”

“Your compliments are only—”

“Lord Killarney and Miss de Brooke—”

“Now, please don’t make me laugh.”

“Killarney is radiant with the tints of early morn—and his stays!—he will burst them if he bends.”

They came up, made a low bow, his lordship’s being somewhat stiff and solemn, and stayed to exchange a few words with the Marchioness. She introduced Avondale, and when they had gone off, threatened to send him away.

“I really could scarcely prevent myself laughing outright.”

“I am dreadfully grieved—but look at him—he pretends to be no older than his grand-niece.”

“The Honourable Stanley Carlton.”

The young gentleman paid his respects to Lady Wharfedale in an easy but half-affected way, nodded to Avondale, and mingled with the company.

“The Honourable Albert Talbot and Lady Risborough.”

They remained a few minutes, passed the stereotyped questions and answers, and moved on.

“What think you, Mr. Avondale, of those two representatives of England’s youthful nobility?”

“I imagine they are not the best that could be found.”

“That is no reply. I wish to hear your opinion on the younger generation.”

“I fear it would not be acceptable to ears polite. The youthful branches of the nobility appear for the most part to be getting thoroughly careless of their rank and position. A great change is looming in the future, and they cannot see it, or will not heed. If they intend to maintain their exclusive privileges, it must be by deserving, not merely claiming them. But you will not thank me for commencing just now a tirade against the sloth and indolence of the classes to which ourselves belong.”

“I should very much; but there is Lord Wharfedale—you have not seen him yet—go and speak to him.”

Avondale somewhat ungraciously obeyed his fair mentor. The Marquis received him heartily, exchanged a few words, and later on in the evening, meeting him again, gave him a personal invitation to the dinner next day.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WITH some eagerness the following morning Avondale turned to the papers, but they contained only short comments on Mr. Maitland's speech. In fact, he had not said enough to lay either himself or his future measures open to criticism. As far as he had spoken he had intimated that he would be supported by most of his colleagues, and that little change would be made in the policy pursued by the late Premier. Mr. Sloe was passed over by all—even the "Pioneer" kept very quiet in respect of him—and scarcely more was said of his rival Radical, Rowe.

It was evident that negotiations were going on between Mr. Maitland and various parties which it was not advisable to make public. He himself was unmistakably in a fix. Should he break with the moderate Liberals or not—or, rather,

could he rely on their support? He possessed too much genius and talent, too great a contempt for popular applause, to be at heart a demagogue, but he was also far too ambitious to trouble much, if necessitated to make a choice, which side he headed—the Republicans, in making an indiscriminate attack on institutions in general, and on the Crown and aristocracy in particular ; or the Whigs—or even Tories, for in early life he had belonged to this party—in upholding Church and State. The latter career he would prefer, but, rather than give up power, he would undoubtedly follow up the former. So just at present his mind was distracted between the two. He was in treaty with Rowe, and very desirous to secure him, respecting, though jealous of, his talents, fearing him as a rival, and doubtful how far he could retain him as an adherent. He was holding out a bait to Sloe, not from any good opinion of the man himself, or of his principles, but from anxiety to restrain his hostility, and to conciliate his following. He was also labouring most earnestly to secure the goodwill of those powerful families who contemned him for an upstart, or disliked him for his temper, or dreaded

the lengths to which opposition might drive him. Thus it was that his own journal gave no sign, that the "Times" was not more communicative, and that the "Constitutional" afforded no information beyond vague rumours.

CHAPTER XIX.

AT Wharfedale House Avondale met several members of the two Houses, whose names were not unknown to him. Sir Henry Kerr was one of the guests ; Sir Edward Wharton another, a jolly-looking country squire, who had represented the eastern division of Mercia since his father's death, ten years before, a man who voted regularly for his own party without troubling at all about the measures brought forward, and who could not understand any one not of gentle blood being at the head of affairs ; Viscount Risborough was a third, a counterpart of Wharton, though not blessed with quite as much common sense, and having a greater liking for a good dinner ; Hugh Acton Bransdon was a fourth, a well-known traveller and author, who had been in the House about five years, and was pointed out by many as certain to take a high position in the political world ; Lord Hainesbury, who had been

under Magnus Jupiter, one of the Under Secretaries for Foreign Affairs, was another. Two more, a large shipowner, and a rising barrister on the Northern circuit, both M.P.s, completed, with Avondale and the Earl of Wyversley, the party.

Lord Wharfedale was a good dinner-giver. He had no brilliant talents, and was too devoid of energy and patient perseverance to leave any great mark behind him in the history of his country; but he was not, as Stuart Jardine once styled him, a dummy—rather the reverse. He was a better leader and controller than follower or originator. His good-nature and *bonhomie* were notorious, and he had a scarcely less reputation for polished manners and courtly address. The latter gained him friends at first sight, the former secured them on better acquaintance. Especially had he attained the difficult art of making his guests, not merely feel at ease, but also thoroughly delighted with each other and their host.

Avondale found himself between Sir Henry Kerr and Sir Edward Wharton, while opposite sat Wyversley, with Mr. Bransdon on his left,

and next their host; and on his right the ship-owner. Viscount Risborough took the end of the table. Conversation soon got into full swing. Kerr and Bransdon—he had been to India in his wanderings—went off into what was common ground to them.

“A grand country,” said the latter, “and capable of being made into a mighty empire, if the people could be awakened from the deadening influence of their religions.”

“Yes, doubtlessly,” replied Kerr, “but how is this to be done? We can only work carefully and unremittingly, and trust to the effects of time.”

“Your administration there has done a great deal of good, if you will permit me to say so; but don’t you think that, perhaps, you have been going somewhat too fast? Don’t you think you may have been pulling down without making full preparations for building up again?”

“You mean that we have been destroying prejudices and breaking down the barriers between caste and caste, and that, while doing this, we have not made arrangements for maintaining our own power. You think that our power

depends upon the enmity in India of race for race, and that by fusing the various nationalities we are destroying our main prop, we are consolidating India against, and not for us."

"It seems to me that is about the real view to be taken. The danger to England arises from within and not from without India, from the growth of one spirit among its different nationalities, and not from the invasions of Russia or France. The Indians prefer our rule to that of either of these, and will not change the burden, but they would have no hesitation about throwing it off altogether."

"Can the natives displace us?"

"Could they, if united? I should certainly say so. I do not deem it possible that there can be such an inherent distinction between one section and another of mankind, that a thousand of the former can keep in subjection a million of the latter."

"And you think, then, the time will come when Hindoostan will be governed by a representative assembly, chosen by its own inhabitants?"

Kerr being thus occupied, Avondale could

scarcely get a word with him, but he easily opened communications with Wharton—

“Who is to be the new Chancellor?” he asked.

“I can’t say. Have not the least idea. Pilgrim, I suppose. But lately affairs have got into such a muddle that I scarcely know which side is in office.”

“I presume, then, Sir Edward, you are not a very enthusiastic admirer of the new Premier?”

“Maitland? No. He is the most conceited—But Kerr is close by, one must not speak too plainly.”

“I don’t think you need fear speaking too plainly,” said Avondale, smiling. “It may be that Kerr himself would say much the same. By the by, don’t you think a nobleman ought to be Premier?”

“Yes, most decidedly, but they are all afraid. The Marquis of Wharfedale, for instance. He would do capitally, if he would put himself in front.”

“I suppose a good many M.P.s hold the same opinion?”

“A good many of us, I fear, have no opinion about anything—we simply go with the tide. It

is not much use to worry yourself; things go along pretty much the same, with or without your interference. Besides, we can't all be Cabinet Ministers, or even Under-Secretaries."

"Of course not."

"And the intrigue and scheming are unceasing. I am content to register my vote, and am never better pleased than when the session is over, and I can get from town back to the birds and the hounds."

Thereupon the conversation drifted to country topics, with which Avondale showed such an acquaintance as to charm the Baronet.

Dinner over, the Marquis whispered to Bransdon, "I wish to get a few minutes' chat with Kerr presently—would you oblige me by holding the lawyer in conversation?"

Then for some time he chatted with Kerr and Avondale, upon indifferent topics, till at last the latter asked him the question he had already asked Wharton—

"Who is to go to the Woolsack?"

"I have not the least idea," replied the Marquis; "I am entirely cut off from all sources of information. Better ask Kerr."

“Indeed, I was about to put him the question. How long is Maitland to head the Ministry?”

“I don’t know,” was the reply. “Not long, I fear—at least, so many persons think.”

“Yourself one, I suppose. And how long will the member for Ballock serve under him, if I may venture to ask?” said Wharfedale.

“That I cannot say—in fact, you are almost as good a judge of that as I am.”

“Well, excuse my saying it, is it at all likely that you and he can hold together long, as leader and adherent? We both know his peculiar temper, and that it is almost impossible to avoid exciting on the least debatable points his anger. We both know that it is that overbearing disposition of his which has caused the present break up as far as it has gone. Those financial measures were most absurd, and, speaking freely, I don’t wonder at Jardine seizing the opportunity to make capital out of the occasion—though, by the by, he declares that our young friend there is really to be thanked for the speech, and was the prompter who finally incited him to make the attack. But it was Maitland who put forward the scheme, purposely, it would seem, to bring

about the present crisis. I remember you opposed it, and so did I, and so did poor Kelly himself, who is now reviled on all sides by every would-be political economist; but Maitland urged it most strongly, saying that we must at least make a show of reducing the taxes, and I don't know what else, and so finally he had his way—the result being that he has ousted Garmouth from his place and crept into it.”

“And there he is likely to remain.”

“Is that your private opinion? and if so, have you made up your mind to settle down quietly as his subordinate?” asked Wharfedale.

“There he will remain, at least, till the Liberals split up. The Tories have not the ghost of a chance,” replied Kerr.

“So one would imagine; that is, at present,” observed Avondale. “But is it an utter impossibility that the great Liberal party may by some unforeseen series of catastrophes be broken up into hostile factions?”

“Anything is possible, especially in politics.”

“The formation of a party opposed to Maitland, for instance,” suggested the Marquis, with a faint smile.

“The formation of such a party? Yes, if the leader had confidence in himself, and the patience to work up the party and the ability to control it. But it would need a man good all round, and it would need, too, definite aims and purposes, more agreeable to the majority of Parliament than those of the present Government.”

Kerr, while speaking, had looked closely at Wharfedale; he smiled meaningly as he concluded.

Said the Marquis, “Let’s come to the point. Leaving the subject of leader apart, is the influence of Maitland over his colleagues such that he can be certain of keeping them with him?”

“Answer for yourself.”

“I have answered; would the same answer apply in your case?”

“If all his colleagues leave him, they simply banish themselves like sulky children who won’t join in a game.”

“You are a true Scotchman, ever cautious. If those colleagues left him, would Maitland and his especial clique have influence enough over the general body of the House to keep them in power against the active opposition of the col-

leagues who had been—so I prefer to put it—kicked contemptuously out of office?”

“Very likely not. Still, these said colleagues would not improve their own position by such a proceeding; they would simply play into the hands of the common foe,” replied Kerr.

“Are you so certain of that? Might not the following of the colleagues—using this rather vague term—be so superior in number to that of Maitland, as to be able to eject him, and seat their leaders in his place?”

“Perhaps so, but very doubtful. There is everything against such an attempt.”

“There is truly everything,” said Avondale; “everything but courage, resolution, foresight, tact, patience, luck—everything but ability, zeal, talent, capacity, hope.”

“If those qualities were all on the side of the smallest opposition ever known,” said Kerr, “they would give that opposition life and vitality, and swell it to a power irresistible.”

“Why should they not be on the side of the opposition now? Maitland is in power because he is in power—that is the whole reason—excuse plain speaking. He has taken his present

position because no one has openly questioned his right to it; he lords it over his associates because they think he has such a vast intellect that they must stand abashed before it; he turns them off as a miser does a worn-out servant, and they humbly accept their fate. No opposition has yet begun to consolidate, but there are all the germs of one ready to start into being. Do you ask for the talent? Take FitzHenry and Bransdon."

"Thanks, Avondale," interrupted the latter. "I could not help catching one or two of your words, and have since been listening. You appear in a new light. I congratulate you. You are putting into language what I have been thinking lately."

"Do you ask for tact? Take the Marquis and Jardine; and believe me, zeal won't be wanting."

"Apparently not."

"This is the first time, Kerr, I have really looked the matter in the face," said the Marquis. "Would you be inclined to join us? A beginning must be made somewhere. It will be months before opposition could take head; but I really think that you would best consult your own

feelings by voluntarily resigning before you are driven to do so."

"You have come down on me with a rush. I will think it over. Could I see you to-morrow morning?"

"Of course, any hour you like. And perhaps you won't object to Bransdon—if he is at leisure—joining us to give us the benefit of his advice."

CHAPTER XX.

SATURDAY EVENING, the report was common that Sir Henry Kerr had resigned. The papers of Monday morning confirmed it; and added that it was understood the Secretary for Ireland would take the post he had relinquished, while Mr. Percy Mulgrave would be promoted to the vacancy thereby created.

The "Times" was sorry to hear of the resignation, and did not altogether approve of the rearrangements. It doubted the new Secretary's fitness for governing the sister Isle, even in peaceable times, and much more so now, when the demon of discontent was once more arising, and agrarian crimes had been reported in many quarters. And it expressed some fears that Mr. Maitland might not be able to retain the full force of the late Ministry.

The "Mercury" took quite a different tone. In losing Kerr, an able man perhaps, but most certainly an obstructive one, had been lost, and

there could not be the shadow of a doubt, that in the ranks of Mr. Maitland's tried and trusty supporters, the real friends and future dependence of Britannia, many a man, at least his equal in ability and patriotism, could be found to supply the place of him, or of others who might be inclined to follow his example. The new President of the Indian Board was a statesman whose long experience (of nearly eighteen months—he had previously been second Secretary at the Court of Timbuctoo, till his elder brother, Sir James Lynworth, dying childless, had left him £20,000 a year) in Irish affairs, coupled with his intimate acquaintance with the peculiar idiosyncrasy of tropical peoples, would fit him admirably for controlling our Indian possessions, and for rendering the sway of England a blessing to countless myriads of subject Hindoos. In Percy Mulgrave, again, we had a politician remarkably fitted for the work allotted him. He was, by birth, partly an Irishman, and he possessed in an eminent degree the vivacity and frankness so characteristic of that race (he had had, indeed, up till his marriage with Lady Thanet, a most charming degree of frankness with his friends,

looking upon their purses as his own, and unhesitatingly borrowing from them whatever they might have to spare, from a crown to a £100 note).

As to the "Constitutional," events were turning out just as the poor old lady expected. "Was it at all likely that Maitland could retain the services of gentlemen? Read his replies to questions in the House if evidence were wanted of his bad temper and want of tact—examine carefully his speeches and proposals during the last two years, if doubts could be entertained of his leaning to Republicanism. One of the best men in the Liberal ranks had withdrawn, others must follow. Even his intimate friends must be utterly disgusted with the appointment of such an individual as Mulgrave to Ireland, a man utterly devoid of statesmanship, talent, or capacity."

Little was said by either journal as to the new Lord Chancellor, and even less as to the successor of Sir George Edmunds, his translation to the Home Office being confirmed—these points were confessedly delicate ground, and were therefore left untouched by comment.

CHAPTER XXI.

WYVERSLEY came to Granstone Street well to his time. The dinner, but a simple affair, was soon finished, and then, over their wine, the two young men began conversation.

“I may as well disburden myself at once,” said Wyversley. “I have come to make a confession, and to ask your advice, Avondale.”

“I shall be glad to listen to the former,” replied his hearer, “and to give you the latter, if it can be of any service to you—which, I dare say, is very doubtful. However, what is it?”

“The long and short of the matter is that I have been going to the bad fast.”

“Very likely; I thought as much. Still you cannot have dipped so very deeply into—what is the stock term for it—the vortex of dissipation.”

“No, not so very deeply for myself—that is, not so much so as at all to encroach on my property; but I have wasted quite enough to ruin

many men, and much more than I need. I had a good many bills, of one sort and the other, floating about when I came of age."

"And yet you had a splendid allowance."

"Yes—well, I settled these, of course, and then began to get about a bit. I don't know how the money went the first year. I did not spend much on horses or betting, and the alterations I had made at Wyversley did not exceed £10,000."

"Perhaps not, but I remember well enough that your house in Durham Square—Lady Wyversley was in town then—was for the whole of the season the scene of a series of pageants, reminding one of the middle ages; and I remember, too, a certain lady who, only one of many, according to common report, assisted you to get rid of your superfluous cash."

"You are not far wrong. We went that summer in my yacht through the Mediterranean. You have never been there, have you, Avondale? The beauty of the Grecian Archipelago surpasses belief. The glorious dawns—the lovely sunsets—the bewitching twilights, with the stars shining out beautifully bright in the dark blue sky, and

the darkness drawing on gradually and softly—you cannot imagine the effect, scarcely even recall it to mind. And then the thousand isles that dot the water—‘Eternal summer gilds them yet’—their surroundings and the reminiscences that come over one, of the long, long past, and of the heroes they have produced, and the events that have been enacted on them—Scio, Naxos, Delos, Zante, ‘Isola d’oro, fior di Levante’—their influence on the mind is beyond belief. Well, we passed the summer among these islands, touching only once or twice on the mainland. The autumn we spent on the Italian lakes, amidst scenery even more attractive to many; yourself for one.”

“Yes, I love the mountains and lakes. South Lyddonshire, you know, is hilly, and much of my life has been spent there.”

“The winter you remember there was a terrible noise about Rose Norton not coming back to fulfil her engagement at the Sun.”

“Yes, ’twas said in the summer that she had gone on the Continent for her health, and then at the beginning of winter, when she did not put in an appearance, we heard she was going to

be married to an Italian nobleman. The playgoers were finely annoyed about it, and I really could not understand it, though I have never troubled you as to the actual facts, as I saw you were thoroughly upset with something or other. A couple of months later her husband's sudden death was reported, and soon after, just before Easter, the lady herself once more returned to her occupation."

"The winter we had agreed to stay at Rome. We had been there two or three weeks when I noticed Rose change. She seemed to tire of my company, and she went out more than before, making rather freer than I liked with some of our acquaintances; we were living as man and wife under the title of Sir Arthur and Lady Vansittart."

"A pretty high ideal of morality, yours, my dear fellow."

"Well, I spoke to her—she objected to my interference. I forbade her to receive some two or three people whom I detested particularly. She would not be dictated to by me, a mere boy, as she styled me; our quarrel grew hotter, and in the midst of it Count Paschiato, as he called

himself, entered unannounced. He was said to be a Neapolitan nobleman who would not acknowledge the supremacy of Victor Emmanuel. He certainly was attached to the Court of King Francis, though in my prejudice I always looked upon him as a spy. He was a particular friend of Rose's, and, therefore, my especial aversion. I asked him what business he had with me. He had called on Lady Vansittart in reference to the devil knows what, and Rose said she was much obliged to him for his trouble. I incontinently told her to add that she would be still more obliged if he would immediately take his ugly visage off, and not show it me again. She would not, and—to cut the story short—I kicked him out of the house. An hour later we had arranged for a duel next morning. That evening, however, I was stabbed by a paid assassin, and by the merest chance in the world escaped death. I had, from instinct, I suppose, turned round to see the fellow after passing him. He was close by me, and I caught the gleam of the stiletto just in time to turn it off the heart on the ribs. I seized his right hand and struck him on

the head with a heavy walking-stick, fracturing his skull so badly that he died in twenty-fours, remaining insensible the whole of the time. I was laid up for a fortnight, and delirious for three or four days, partly from loss of blood, partly from excitement. During my illness Rose married the Count. I had, prior to leaving London, settled £5,000 on her, and I dare say I had given her as much after. When I recovered I found they had gone to Malta. I intended to follow, but was persuaded to return to England by the urgent remonstrances of Ravenshurst, who had come out just about the time I was stabbed; sent, I believe, by my mother. He declared he would keep the circumstance from her only on condition I returned with him, and so I came back, reaching London the day before Christmas."

"My dear fellow, I never suspected you had gone through so much romance. I met you, if you recollect, several times in January at Clair Street, and could not help noticing how very recklessly you played. I thought something was wrong, and gave Rose Norton credit for part of

it, but had no inkling of the real state of the case. But how was it she also returned soon after?"

"It seems—for I took the trouble to find out the real facts—that the Count was no Count at all, merely, as I had suspected, a spy. He had been a petty officer in the Sardinian army, and had joined in a conspiracy to render the troops disaffected, and so procure the recall of the dethroned Bourbon. The plot being detected, he had had to take refuge in the Pope's dominions, and had thenceforward been employed by King Francis to foment disturbances in the South, and to carry on the correspondence with different bandits. He was also married."

"Oh, your narrative is getting interesting, my friend."

"And towards the end of February his *vera uxor* searched him out, and put in her prior claim. He attempted to shut her mouth in the same way that he had tried to prevent our duel, but the fellow he employed mistook the woman, and stabbed Rose, happily not fatally, as you are aware. What was more, the police caught the would-be assassin, who thereupon

made a clean breast, and, of course, Paschiato was wanted next. He had, however, decamped ; perhaps was sheltered by those in authority, and would, not improbably, have escaped, but for his wife's vengeance. At least, a few days later, his body was discovered in one of the by streets with a stiletto in the heart."

"So ends Act I. of your life."

"Yes, but it influenced Act II. very much. I felt thoroughly cut up with the adventure, and savage with everybody, and myself. The summer and early autumn had been a time of unalloyed pleasure and enjoyment; the winter—ugh!—I don't like to think of it. My bankers, too, at the commencement of the new year, informed me, to improve matters, that the outlay I had gone to at Wyversley and Durham Square, together with my other expenses during the twelve months, had shrunk the balance in their hands by near £80,000. I don't care a rap for money. I think it ought to be spent, not hoarded—but when I considered that this sum was, for the chief part, utterly wasted, and that the bitter experience I had acquired was thus dearly bought, it made me the wilder."

“I don’t see the force of the reasoning, though. Because you have made one false step, it won’t mend matters to make another that will take you further on the same road.”

“Doubtless not, and you remonstrated with me then, and so did others, but it was no good. Logic has not much effect when a man is bent on destruction. I lost heavily at Clair Street, and still more heavily, later on in the summer, at Baden. Then I lost a large sum on the races. I won at Newmarket and the Derby, but at Ascot and Goodwood I went altogether astray. And then these women ; I never was out of their clutches. One would have thought I had had experience enough in that line, but I was like a moth that hovers round the flame till his wings are singed past recovery. At Paris I picked up a girl, Aimée de Beauvoir—you know her, the favourite danseuse at the Théâtre Condé—the devil, I suppose, brought us together. She went with me through Switzerland, and then to Wiesbaden, Baden, and Homburg. I seemed to be in bad luck whenever I played, but she tempted me on. At Homburg I did not go much to the public tables, but went chiefly to a

private house frequented by several acquaintances we had made in our tour. The stakes were not heavy at first, and for about a fortnight I had, on the whole, gained. One night, however, I was made drunk, or the wine was drugged, or something of the kind. I cannot remember anything distinctly; I only know we went on playing till the morning sun shone through the windows. Then we left off, and I fell asleep. Five or six hours later, when I came to myself, I found I had given bills for £30,000."

"That's buying experience with a vengeance."

"I could not deny my signature, but determined to play no more. Aimée used all her wiles to persuade me to have my revenge, but to no purpose. In the evening two Frenchmen, a Baron de Cluvere and a Captain Bruvante, who dined with us, tried the same arguments, but, finding me firm, took their departure somewhat vexed. It was a splendid sunset, and Aimée and I walked about the gardens for some time, thoroughly enjoying ourselves. She was sprightly—bewitching in fact—now tenderly turning her limpid eyes on me, and then cutting short my fine speeches—loving and distant by turns. You

know the ways of those girls, Walter—the father of evil must himself have given them lessons before sending them into this world on their errand of ruin and destruction. I had never seen her so attractive, and could have married her on the spot. As I had an engagement with some friends I had met that day, I left her very unwillingly about nine o'clock at our villa. I got over the call as soon as possible, and was hurrying back, when, while passing behind one of the little summer-houses, I heard well-known voices. The first words I caught were—

“‘Ah, Meinherr, das Spiel ist nicht aus,’ in a woman’s tones; and then in French, ‘If he comes back early enough, trust me he will visit the table once more this very night.’

“‘I hope so,’ grunted] the German—’twas the fellow who owned the house—‘he is too good a bird to be let off at once.’

“‘You are a good girl, Aimée,’ said a voice I recognised as the Baron’s, ‘and if we can only get another £5,000 out of him for our share, we will go back to Lorraine, and rebuild the old castle, and you shall be La Baronne.’

“I could restrain myself no longer, but jumped

into the midst of the swindlers. I have not the least idea what I said, but the set began laughing in my face. I knocked down the Captain first—he was there—and the Baron next, when the German did the same for me with the loose leg of one of the chairs. I suppose they picked my pockets, for watch, purse, and rings were all gone. I must partially, at least, have come to myself, for I heard Aimée say—‘*Pauvre garçon*, he looks beautiful in the moonlight.’ How long I lay there I don’t know. The police found me, sent, I believe, by the German, carried me off to the lock-up, and, spite of my asseverations, kept me in durance all night, hinting that I was drunk. They let me out willingly enough next morning, when I had sent for my friends. When I got back to the villa we had taken I found everything in confusion. Aimée’s maid must have been in the plot, for both were gone. Boxes and drawers were ransacked, and every article of jewellery and the like had disappeared. I had the German arrested, but as I could prove nothing against him, and as he showed that he had not left his house that evening, the only result was that I had to pay the costs and him 200 thalers as

damages, and was, besides, considered half-crazed by the English visitors at the Springs."

"Well, Wyversley, your adventure sounds like a romance; but so much talking must be rather dry work. Take another glass of this Madeira—it is old—my grandfather put it in bottle in '16, in memory of Waterloo. The governor has not above three-dozen of it left now—he sent me up half-a-dozen bottles on my birthday, a week or two ago."

"It is very good—has a good flavour; but I am no judge of wine. I can tell when it is bad, and that is all."

"That is one of the strange points about you—mad for women, careless of wine."

"No, not exactly that. I am attracted towards woman, not from any sensuous, much less sensual pleasure, but from an inner prompting which makes my soul long for female companionship."

"Why, in the name of goodness then, my dear fellow, don't you select one of your own station—these creatures cannot surely be your ideal of female perfection, or supply the spiritual communion you long for."

"No—I dare say it is because I have been brought up amongst the other class."

"Go on with your adventures. I won't argue with you, at least not now. This is the end of Act II., I presume."

"Not quite. I thought of searching for Baron Cluvere, but soon came to the conclusion that it would be useless. I did, nevertheless, ascertain that there was no family of that name in Lorraine, and last Easter I learnt something more of him. I came across Aimée as a street singer in Paris. I ventured, doubting the advisability of the step, to send for her, and after some time she told me the sequel. The Baron was really one, though the owner of but a few acres of barren land, his true name being l'Espronte. He cheated the 'Captain,' who was Aimée's brother and an adventurer living by his wits, out of his share of the plunder, and hinted that he would have him prosecuted for attempting to extort money, when he, the 'Captain,' had threatened to denounce the Baron. He, of course, did not marry Aimée, whom he had known for some years, and who had often lent him money, but kept her as his

mistress only till the commencement of winter, then replacing her by a new face.”

“A scamp of the purest water—one of the most characteristic productions of the new empire. One consolation, the devil generally gets his own.”

“He has got this fellow. He—Cluvere, I mean, not the devil—was riding in the Bois on New Year’s Day—he was not very grand in the saddle—when his horse slipped on the frosty ground, pitching him forward, and breaking his neck. Aimée told me she had had a hard time of it during the winter, not being able to get into a theatre again. Her face bore witness to this. I gave her two or three pounds, and said I would supply her with what she might want to get into some small business, if she would try to find an opening somewhere—and then she broke down into a bitter flood of tears, praying me to forgive her. Poor mortal, we all want forgiveness badly enough. I can never stand a woman’s tears. In about a week she came to me, saying she had come across such a nice little concern, a *modiste’s*, or something of the kind. All that she wanted was £50, if I really

could be so bountiful. I at once handed her the money, and was thoroughly rejoiced to think I could put down to my account at least one good action. The next evening I went to the opera, and whom do you think I saw in the front row of the dress circle?"

"Oh, Aimée!" exclaimed Avondale, with a burst of laughter. "It is really too good, my dear fellow. Go on—I shall not be surprised if you say the Baron was with her."

"No, not the Baron, but some other fellow of the same stamp—one of her old acquaintances, probably. She, herself, was resplendent—it would have required a practised hand to have made out her true position. The *rencontre* gave me such a revulsion of feeling that I returned to England instantler, perfectly disgusted with the duplicity of human nature."

"And perfectly satisfied, I presume, with your own career during the past two years, and with the deep respect you had paid to the requirements of society, and to the wishes and opinions of your friends and relatives."

"Quite the reverse—as much vexed at my own stupidity and mis-spent time, as any living

being could possibly be, and, indeed, I am not much better pleased with myself now. When the bankers, at the beginning of this year, went over my accounts, they reported I had shrunk the balance by about £60,000 more; and at Newmarket and the Derby I have since sent off another £10,000. But, by Jove, it's after nine o'clock already, and I have a very particular message for you, Walter. Lady Wharfedale wishes to see you this evening. She specially charged me to bring you to the house—I was there this morning—as soon as possible after dinner. Dear me, I shall be finely blown up for being so late.”

“What is it, Wyversley?”

“Can't tell—you must learn from the lady's own lips. So, excuse me, the quicker we are off, the better. I will finish my narrative some other time; and, by the by, you were going to see Auricoma—would Wednesday evening suit you?”

“Yes; at present I am not engaged.”

“Then we will go down to Chelsea together.”

“Agreed; but Wyversley, my dear fellow, you must get clear of the betting harpies that

are about you. Anything will be better than walking to perdition eyes open. Try politics, travel, or even go in for missionary meetings—anything at all—spend your money on model cottages or amateur locomotives, but don't let knavish jockeys and villainous pothouse-keepers diddle you out of it."

CHAPTER XXII.

THEY took a cab in Piccadilly, and reached Wharfedale House in a few minutes. In addition to the visitors, whom the Marquis was never without, only Mr. FitzHenry and Lord Ravenshurst had dined with him that day. The gentlemen had come into the drawing-room just before the arrival of Wyversley and Avondale. The Marchioness complimented them upon their punctuality, and trusted that the remembrance of her request had not proved too heavy a strain for the Earl of Wyversley's memory, or the performance of it too great an encroachment on his private engagements.

"You see how it is, Walter," said the offender. "You can never swerve a hair's-breadth from a lady's command, or omit a little of it, without subjecting yourself to the terrors of the inquisition."

"Please, excuse him," pleaded Avondale.

“He has been giving me an account of his visits to the Continent, and no wonder if messages to such an insignificant individual as myself should have run the risk of being forgotten.”

“I dare say his peregrinations have been most interesting—I have never heard anything of them—and I trust satisfactory to himself; but I wished to see you, Mr. Avondale, about something quite as interesting—your own future. Oh, here is the Marquis; he will explain it to you.”

The Marquis was very glad to see Avondale, and immediately took him off to FitzHenry.

“Here,” he said, “is the young gentleman we have been talking about.” Then turning to Avondale, who had not the faintest notion what it was all about—“we want you to try at once to get into Parliament.”

A light instantly broke over his listener’s mind, and he comprehended intuitively whom he was to oppose—

“You wish me to put up against Mulgrave, if he has to seek re-election.”

“Just so—who told you?”

“No one—I have been wondering since Wyversley informed me of your commands, as to

what the message meant ; but it flashed through my brain on your speaking that it was the new Irish Secretary you would put me against. Is it settled that Mulgrave is to take that post?"

"I believe so—I heard as much early this morning, and Lord Ravenshurst—I will introduce you to him directly—tells me the matter was finally arranged this afternoon. If so, we must lose no time. Do you know Waterbridge?"

"Not a bit."

"So much the worse, but we must make the best of it. FitzHenry is well acquainted with one of the leading firm of solicitors there, and promises to get them to take you up."

"It is very kind of him—I am extremely obliged to you, sir."

"Don't thank me at all," replied FitzHenry. "Lady Wharfedale is the grand conspirator. It is a great pity you are not yet called. It would give you a better standing."

"That difficulty won't stand in my way. I have been called three terms."

"Have you? I am delighted to hear it, Whose chambers have you been in?"

“Gilbert’s in Pump Court—do you know him?”

“Yes, perfectly well—a descendant of the man ‘On Uses,’ and a very good Chamber Counsel. I wonder I did not notice your name, but I do not think I see the list at all. We shall have to get your address ready to-morrow, and send it off by the evening post to the gentlemen, Rosse and Taylor, who are to bring you out. I will write them, too, and I have no doubt that they will enable you to have, at least, some chance. Have you had any experience in canvassing?”

“Not worth speaking of. I have, of course seen one or two contested elections carried on in my own neighbourhood; but only from the outside—my father takes no interest in them.”

“Then you have, by all accounts, a treat in store,” laughed the Marquis.

“I know,” replied Avondale, “Waterbridge has a somewhat unsavoury reputation, but, I suppose, a candidate need not necessarily mix himself up with all the blacklegs in the town.”

“Perhaps not—it is rather difficult to avoid it.”

“Don’t be in the least afraid of that, Avondale,” said FitzHenry; “the firm I introduce you to are most honourable men, Rosse especially, who comes of a good county family, and who would, but for strong leanings towards a country life, have chosen the higher branch of the profession. I have no doubt, too, there are some honest men among the voters; and you will have on your side most of the Church party—Dissent is rampant there—and of the Tories. If you don’t get in, you will, at least, have made your *débüt*, and if the other side go to any very bare-faced bribery we will present a petition.”

Here Wyversley joined them, saying that the ladies were extremely anxious to know whether the interesting debate was to be continued all the evening.

“It does not look very polite of us,” said the Marquis, “to remain chatting here in a corner. I presume it is settled so far, Mr. Avondale? The best way will be, perhaps, for you to call on me to-morrow morning, say by 12 o’clock, with your address ready. I will look it over, and after lunch you can take it to FitzHenry’s chambers—

will you be in to-morrow afternoon? What time will suit you—3 o'clock?"

"I think so—if I am called away, I will leave a note for our young friend."

"Then the meeting is adjourned *sine die*. Come on, Avondale—here is Lord Ravenshurst."

Ravenshurst was a man well known in society, almost unheard of in the world at large. He had travelled considerably, was a good linguist, had a cultivated taste for art, and was as well read in history and general literature as he was acquainted with modern courts and institutions. An innate dislike for bother had prevented him embarking on the troubled seas of politics. He had given too much attention to his books and travels to find time to fall in love now. In early life, and as he had been but a cadet of his family, he had had no opportunity of doing so. He had by a chain of unforeseen occurrences, come into the title a dozen years previously, but his inclinations were then fixed. His only sister, Clare, was the wife of Sir Hugh Champion. He was a distant relation and intimate friend of the Countess Wyversley, and was consequently greatly interested in her son's welfare.

Lord Ravenshurst uttered a few courteous words expressive of his pleasure at making Avondale's acquaintance, and then the latter passed on to where Lady Wharfedale, and one or two ladies, were sitting. He thanked her for the interest—which she repudiated—she had shown towards him, and for the trouble which FitzHenry at her request had promised to take on his behalf. He stayed but a short time, for he was eager to think over, quietly by himself, his prospects. His hostess introduced him to two or three of the guests, and then, after a little fashionable chit-chat, he took his departure.

FitzHenry and Wyversley accompanied him to the hall.

“I think you are politician enough,” said the former, “not to need any caution on the score of prudence and secresy. Of course, you enter on this election entirely on your own responsibility, and without prompting from any one—you understand?”

“Yes, I hope so. I can fully perceive the absolute necessity of not allowing any other person's name to be mixed up with mine in the matter.”

“That's right then.”

“Walter, excuse me,” said Wyversley; “if, in respect of money matters, I can be of the least service to you, do not hesitate to command me—you will confer a favour on me.”

“Much obliged, but I believe I shall not have the opportunity of making use of your kind offer.”

“I hope you will, if you can—and don’t forget that I will call for you on Wednesday, at 5.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

AVONDALE, with the irrepressible eagerness inseparable from youth, sketched the outline of his address before going to rest. But when he had done this, and laid down, sleep long refused to visit his eyes. Many and varied were the thoughts that flitted through his brain. Of the two great springs of human action, ambition, rather than love, was his prompter. From early youth gleams of future greatness had appeared to him. He had, to a great extent, been a solitary child, cut off from association with others of his own age, his chief companions being his stern father and his sister. Thus, not a little of his time had been spent in gazing at the portraits hung on the library walls at Avondale, or at the suits of armour arranged in the hall. Stories too of his ancestors' renown had been often told him by the old servants of the family, and, even farther back, his nurse had lulled him to

sleep with ballads narrating the deeds and actions of heroes of the olden time. As he grew older, he, by degrees, learnt to comprehend better the greatness of his family in past centuries, and more and more fixed became the determination that he would strive to restore it to the position it had once occupied.

He had selected law for his profession, in the fixed resolve to toil up its rugged and uninviting paths to fame, but he had no real liking for its study, and found extremely difficult the task of applying his attention unremittingly to its technicalities. It was, therefore, with unalloyed delight that he saw the far wider and more exciting career of politics thrown open to him. He had thorough confidence in himself, the confidence that every true man ought to have in his powers before entering on any undertaking. He knew how delighted his father and sister would be at his success, and he felt that he had many firm friends who would cheer him on.

A lady, too, as is almost universally the case, was influencing his thoughts. This was Miss Dawson. He regarded her with very mixed feelings, not, perhaps, so much with love, as with

a romantic idea of attempting to heal a breach between the two houses. Their parents, as already mentioned, were on terms anything but friendly.

This idea he had conceived years ago ; it had grown with his growth, but had hardly ripened into the affection that knits soul to soul and heart to heart by an indissoluble bond, and that has such an overwhelming effect on the opening life of man or woman.

The papers next morning chronicled an item of news, totally unexpected, and of great moment to Avondale—the death on the previous day of Mr. Ileford, the senior member for Waterbridge. He was a consistent Liberal, and had long been in the House, though he had occupied his late seat only for the last two or three sessions. This event, if it did not give Avondale the better chance of election, at least took away the invidiousness of opposing a Minister, and it certainly could not increase Mulgrave's hopes. Candidates who might have been indisposed to contest the single seat with him would not feel the slightest objection to coming forward now there were two vacancies.

Walter drew out his address again, and then, soon after breakfast, called on Mr. Jardine. That gentleman was not at all surprised at the information, and congratulated him on the opportunity offered. One bit of advice he tendered—

“Whatever you do, Walter, whatever may be the odds against you, do not bribe. Supposing the other side is just as bad, so that in case you should be successful—not very likely at the first attempt—they would not venture to petition, still you will not feel satisfied with yourself, and there is always the risk that at some future time the affair may come out. You know how the evidence extricated by the special commissions on Gauntville and Herrington brought about the Bribery Bill, which, besides fixing heavier penalties, may take from the Commons the hearing of petitions, and hand them over to the judges. We do not yet know how the Bill, if passed, will work, but there is no fear that any case will be hushed up, because it is too disgraceful. Waterbridge would be a capital place for the first trial. You are, of course, aware, Walter, that that borough is noted for its more than average disregard of common honesty.”

“Yes! It is on a par with Dirty Lucre, in East Anglia, the town represented by that immaculate Dissenter, Sammy Simpkins.”

“These two towns are a well-fitted pair. Neither could escape disfranchisement, if one of their elections were inquired into. I am surprised that Mulgrave runs the risk; but he is unlucky, or a bad canvasser. He has failed two or three times, and is probably glad with what fate offers, and content to wade through a little mud to get into office. But I won’t bother you with advice just now. Do you know that the Dean of Cambridge is to be the new bishop?”

“No; the papers have nothing about him. But I am not surprised, I had an inkling Tracy might not be appointed.”

“Ah, I thought as much. You set that stone rolling, I suppose. Persuaded Lady Wharfedale to conspire with a whole lot of other women, and so to get Garmouth to assert his prior right—was that the fact?”

“Oh, no. Lady Wharfedale would not allow me to give her advice; and, being such a champion of her husband, she probably required no prompting to do Maitland a bad turn. Besides,

the appointment of Tracy would have been a slur on the whole Church."

Mrs. Jardine here came in, and her husband explained Avondale's errand. She warmly congratulated him, and wished him all success, and made him promise to come to dinner that evening, to narrate the progress of his undertaking.

Thence Avondale proceeded to Wharfedale House. He found the Marquis disengaged, and expecting his arrival. The address proved satisfactory—one or two sentences were suppressed, and the wording slightly altered, but nothing more.

"It would have been a difficult matter," said he, "for you to oppose Mulgrave without appearing to play into the hands of the Tories. An unknown man, you could not have had much hope of success without their assistance, which, however, might have turned the scale in your favour, backed up as you will be by FitzHenry's secret influence. But the, I may say, opportune decease of Ileford has given you a substantial excuse for offering yourself. The Tories, too, will now, undoubtedly, bring forward their own man. Who will be the other Radical candidate

I have no idea. One thing we must lay down—you must not, on any account, bribe.”

“Upon that I am determined. I will not run the risk of an exposure, in case a petition should be presented.”

“Keep to that determination. You might yourself, perhaps, wish to petition, which, if you had been mixed up in any dirty work, you would not venture to do. By the by, do the papers say anything about the new bishop? I have not had time to look at them.”

“Not a word; but Mr. Jardine has told me—I have just left him—that the Dean of Cambridge is to be the man.”

“Yes, how did he hear?”

“He did not say. I presume it is your lordship’s influence that has brought about the change.”

“I suppose so, partly; but it was Lady Wharfedale who was the active party, though I have no doubt the Earl of Garmouth was not at all grieved at the opportunity of depriving his late colleague of a valuable piece of patronage. How will Mordaunt Tracy take it?”

“I imagine it will not affect him in the

slightest. He is a man too intent upon his own welfare to care much for the rise or downfall of his relative unless it concerned himself *pro tanto*."

"He prides himself, I believe, on his knowledge of the world, but his sagacity may not prove as deep as he considers it."

"Very probably not. I have seen very little of him the last fortnight. He keeps out of the way—is negotiating with Maitland, I suppose—indeed, the other day the 'Mercury' mentioned his name for office."

"So I heard. There have been lately countless meetings and deep plottings at Lady Barnet's, conglomerations of men of all shades of opinion, dinners, and I know not what. And the good lady herself has been most active, driving about and visiting unremittingly."

"Tracy, however, has been completely dropped again. I see that the Lord Chancellor is to retain office."

"Yes, evidently Maitland is making desperate efforts to conciliate all parties."

"He will probably fail; his temper is against him. I cannot see any insuperable difficulty to

reorganising the Liberals and moderate Tories. If this were done, if they had any definite path before them, any recognised leader, many of the present Ministry would resign—the Marquis of Exmoor, Herbert Williams, and Lord Tintern; for instance.”

“That may be; but it is no very easy matter to discipline a disorderly crowd; and who is there can undertake the task?”

“Your lordship need hardly ask who should take upon himself the office of leader; and the finding able and willing assistants would be no very difficult matter.”

“*Peut-être*—one must have patience. There is no need to force your neighbour’s play when you have a pretty good hand yourself. If Maitland retains men like Williams he will have to show more tact and command of temper than he just now gets credit for. If he cannot do so the Radicals alone will not suffice to keep him in power. Anyhow he must make up his Ministry by next Monday, and pitch upon some defined policy.”

“He won’t find it a very easy matter.”

“No, nor would any one else. There are so

many subjects requiring legislation, or at least on which the country demands legislation. The church, law and justice, criminals, education, the colonies, Ireland—that shoal on which so many Ministries have stranded—all these are subjects of more or less importance, either is quite sufficient to displace an unstable Government. But we will adjourn to lunch, if you please.”

Arrived in the dining-room, the Marquis apologised for the absence of the ladies.

“They are all out, and I am quite alone. Even my secretary has left me for the day. Your grandfather used to be a frequent visitor here, Mr. Avondale. He was an intimate associate of my father when a young man ; there is one of his portraits between the windows. Both were thoroughly rackety, but those little wildnesses were condoned when the last of the Georges was king. It is very different now, you must bear that in mind. I wish Wyversley could be persuaded to settle down to politics. He has spent a lot of money one way and the other ; no one but himself knows how, though rather ugly tales are afloat concerning his doings on the Continent. The Countess is deeply grieved for him ; it is the

reason why she is not in town this season. How long have you known him? You appear familiar with him."

"About three years; lately he has rather taken to me."

"I wish you would exert your influence to get him to attend more to the duties of his station; I should deem it a personal favour. I would be the last to withdraw young men from the amusements of their age, or even from its indiscretions. It saves them from being prigs and muffs, and it gives them experience which they must acquire sooner or later, and which is necessary to understand fully the forces bearing upon society. But the line is easily overstepped, especially by persons composing a peculiar class with special privileges, whose deeds are scanned very closely by the public."

"Your lordship is quite right; I have pressed the same on Wyversley. He entirely agrees with it; but his good-nature and easy disposition make him a prey, even with his eyes open, to the machinations of modern harpies."

"Good-nature and easy disposition are the

bane of many a man. Always bear in mind your own philosophy, Avondale."

They went on chatting till lunch was over, and then Avondale sought Mr. FitzHenry's chambers. The lawyer was engaged in a consultation which occupied half-an-hour. At length he was admitted into the great man's presence, though press of business limited the interview to a very few minutes. Mr. FitzHenry glanced hurriedly over the address.

"Good, though not improbably Rosse and Taylor will alter it a little. There is a telegram from them."

It ran—

"Ileford's death known last night. Starrett, shipowner, offers himself and addresses a meeting to-night. Send your friend down to-morrow."

"You see you must be off at once. Here is my letter to Rosse and Taylor. I tell them sufficient about you, and that you will not bribe even if they would, which is not likely. I will put your manifesto in it. Let me hear from you after your first day's canvassing. I cannot do more than wish you good luck."

CHAPTER XXIV.

AVONDALE returned to his rooms, wrote home to ask his father's permission to proceed to the election, and to tell his sister he should not be able to meet her on her arrival in town on Thursday, but that no doubt Mr. Jardine would do so; and sent a brief note to Wyversley to tell him it was impossible to keep his engagement.

This done, he dressed and went to Mr. Jardine's. An agreeable surprise was in store for him in the presence of Miss Dawson. She had come to town a day or two before, and was staying with some friends of the Jardines, who, with Mr. Renshall, formed the sole guests. Mrs. Jardine had seen her there, and having some slight knowledge of Avondale's feelings, had invited her solely for his sake, for in truth Miss Dawson had not favourably impressed her. She was a fine, taking girl undeniably, but she was too taking, too *prononcée*, too much in the style.

of Kate Vandeleur, who was her especial abhorrence. Tall, well made, haughty in carriage, lively in conversation, a girl, in fact, who would attract notice anywhere, and who was aware of it. Her features were good, but somewhat too fleshy, and exhibiting that tendency to coarseness which transforms many a woman beautiful at three-and-twenty into a masculine matron at thirty. She received Avondale quite coolly with none of the animation that betokens more than every day acquaintance, with condescension rather than love. When she heard of the prospect before him, and saw the thorough heartiness with which Mr. Jardine's family entered into his recital, she deigned to exhibit some little interest also.

"I think I shall go down, too," said Mary Jardine. "I should so like to see an election, especially if there was a row—of course, if I were in safety," she added.

There was a laugh at the qualification, and then one of the guests said—

"I don't think your wish would be gratified at Waterbridge. It is a most unromantic town, and its inhabitants have a most unromantic

liking for bribery. It is in the midst of a marsh, a few miles from the sea, situated, so to speak, on a mudbank. Dirt abounds everywhere, in the streets, in the stream that crawls through it, and the electors have a wonderful liking for that article. They would take any amount of Miss Mary's money, but they certainly would not fight to please her."

"A charming place, truly, Walter," ejaculated Stuart Jardine.

"By the by, Mr. Avondale," asked Mrs. Jardine, "when does your sister's train come in on Thursday? We must go to meet her."

"About three o'clock. I have written to tell her I shall be at Waterbridge then."

"Is Edith coming up?" enquired Miss Dawson. "I will come and meet her if Mrs. Horler will excuse me."

"Thank you; she will be very glad to see some one she knows," replied Avondale.

Dinner over, Stuart Jardine arranged to go down with Avondale next day. Avondale was sorry not to be able to wait for his sister, but as he must return before Saturday when he

had to give evidence for the railway, it did not much matter.

Miss Dawson sang one or two songs which he asked for, and even assured him she should anxiously await the news of his success. She added that she would write to his sister the next day and tell her she had seen him, and how very pleased she would be to have her in London—all which kind words Avondale treasured up in his heart—or thought he did, which was much the same, and well nigh as satisfactory to both parties.

BOOK II.



WATERBRIDGE ELECTION.

WATERBRIDGE ELECTION.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT a wonderful vitality the British Constitution must possess ! Battered by opponents, ridiculed by philosophers, abused by reformers, assaulted from without and within, its foundations rotten and decayed, its exterior patched and defaced, it yet survives, while many a more showy but less stable edifice has tumbled into ruins. For many reasons must it be styled a wonderful structure. Based upon feudalism, that makeshift confessedly devised to mould together into new shape the scattered remnants of the Roman empire, it has never entirely got rid of its ancient form. Feudalism still exerts a powerful influence amongst us. The peerage now is the peerage of the Conqueror, with its powers intact at least in theory, with its invidious privileges scarcely diminished. Westminster Hall is the West-

minster Hall, as the English Justinian left it; a court has been added, the number of judges increased, and one desperate attempt made to bring justice home to the door of each man; but no great innovation has been made, and the judges who invented "Fines and Recoveries," and the Chancellors who built up "Uses," could, with a little assistance, resume their seats beside their learned brethren of the nineteenth century, and might, not unlikely, be able to assist these in dealing with primogeniture, the L. C. & D. Ry. Co. "Limited Liabilities," and Trades Unions.

Monasticism, too, has left its mark, and only within the last few years have people awoke to the knowledge that the system of education contrived in the middle ages is hardly the best kind of training to fit a man for dealing with Atlantic Cables and Armstrong guns, Suez Canals and Organic Chemistry.

Henry VIII. yet lives in the supremacy that hampers every motion of the National Church, and that enables under its protection the infidel to repudiate openly the oath which never bound his conscience, and the Papist to ape the mummery of the Church which delayed for centuries the

advance of civilisation. Elizabeth's famed poor-law still fills our workhouses with a pauper population, and spite of Malthus' cogent reasoning and Ricardo's penetrating intellect, is yet by the majority believed to be the only panacea for the ills of poverty. The Divine Right of the first Stuart even now prohibits marriage between a subject and that higher order of being in whose veins flows blood drawn from the charmed fountain of royalty.

Truly our whole social system is a most extraordinary conglomeration of anomalies. Norman, Plantagenet, Tudor, and Stuart, conqueror, statesman, tyrant, and fool have each contributed to the *olla podrida* ; Saxon freeholder, feudal baron, knight templar, shaveling monk, bigoted Puritan have one and all left an unmistakable relic in the mass ; and now we stand gazing half in dread, half in wonder at the ungainly, unwieldy, tottering pile, longing to pull it down, ere it comes crashing on our heads, yet doubting our ability to restore it.

But of the whole arrangement, our mode of conducting elections is from beginning to end—canvass, nomination, poll—perhaps the best

specimen. The candidate makes the circle of his constituency for the express purpose of biassing in his favour, by fair reasoning or downright lying as best suits, the mind of each householder. The nomination takes place in public amidst deafening shouting, and in presence of a yelling crowd, on no other grounds than that "it has always been so;" and the polling is similarly carried out, in order apparently to afford the blacklegs and ragamuffins a saturnalia and an opportunity for indulging their peculiar tastes.

CHAPTER II.

A RIDE of four to five hours brought Avondale and Stuart Jardine to Waterbridge. This is a small tenth-rate port, doing little save coasting trade. It is situate some six miles from the sea, in the midst of a moor, which encloses it all sides and extends from the shore, inland nearly or quite fifteen miles to where a low ridge of the chalk rises up through the alluvium, spreading northwards half-a-dozen miles to the Iron Hills, and southward twice as far to the high grounds of Torbury. The country around affords rich grazing pasture for large herds of cattle. Indeed, the view in the summer from either of the "Cairns" of Torbury, is fine and pleasing. Below, reaching to the very foot of the Torbury range, lies the plain, fruitful, fertile, watered by several small streams, which unite to form the river, running through Waterbridge, here, stretching acre on acre, heavy crops ready for the scythe, there many

a fat "beast" peacefully browsing. But in winter this is altogether changed. The whole moor often lies under water, and Waterbridge itself barely escapes inundation. The railway runs for some distance along the coast, and is elevated sufficiently to give passengers a very fair prospect of the country through which they are passing. Thus our travellers were inclined to form a much more favourable opinion of the neighbourhood, whatever its inhabitants might be, than they had been led to anticipate. It was a grand summer's day, the moor was clothed in freshest green, and the heights of Torbury forming the back ground, completed the picture.

They sent their luggage to the "Royal George," the chief hotel, and themselves at once sought out Messrs. Rosse and Taylor. These gentlemen were well known to every one, and their offices were reached in a few minutes. Both were in. Mr. Rosse was a tall, portly man of commanding presence, about fifty. He showed little of the lawyer, and much more of the country gentleman. He had a recognised position and influence in the town, and was the confidential adviser of most of the best families

in the district, Tory as well as Liberal, though in politics he was himself of the latter party. Taylor was a different individual, the working partner. He was fifteen years younger, had an agreeable but professional manner, and was generally respected for his astuteness. He gave our two friends a quick, clear look, and then picked out Avondale, before the latter had made himself known. Avondale introduced Jardine.

“The son of the member for—I really forget the place?” asked Mr Rosse.

“I have the pleasure,” replied Jardine. “I have come down with my friend to see how he gets on at his first attempt; and besides I have some little curiosity to see Waterbridge itself—one hears a great deal about it.”

“Most probably—it has a reputation which, I fear will hardly be appreciated by Mr. Avondale. My friend FitzHenry speaks very highly indeed of you, sir.”

Some further conversation took place as to the proceedings of the following days, the committee, &c., and then they separated.

Next morning Avondale accompanied by Mr. Taylor and Stuart Jardine, started on his pere-

grinations. The undertaking after a while became more monotonous than agreeable. His address had been well posted, and it being known that Rosse and Taylor had given him their assistance, he was well received by the better class. He had some difficulty in making it understood that he came forward as an independant Liberal, a supporter, though not an adherent of Mr. Maitland, unconnected with Mulgrave, opposed to the Tories, and averse to Radicalism. The introductions were much of the same kind throughout.

First it was Mr. Johnson, Methodist, linen-draper, who had a dreadful horror of the Puseyites, and who thought it incumbent upon the Government immediately to contrive some means for putting down their machinations, “which, sir, are tending to subvert the kingdom, and will soon, if not stopped—you may take the experience of an old man for it—(he had never been 10 miles from Waterbridge)—bring England again under the Pope. You should see what they are doing at the new Church, Mr. A—A—Appleby; it is just idolatry.” (At the new Church the parson preached in his surplice, and a few flowers

were placed on the Communion table.) Of course, Avondale expressed his hatred, and that not feigned, of Ritualists, and thereupon Mr. Johnson promised he would, at least, attend a meeting to hear his opinions at length. Next it was Mr. Clarke, a bookseller, and one of the Churchwardens at the new Church. He disliked Dissenters as cordially as his neighbour did the Puseyites—out of his business, that is—in it he made no distinction, and would supply a customer as willingly with “Dr. Watts” as with “Hymns Ancient and Modern.” It was not difficult for Avondale to convince Mr. Clarke that their opinions on religious matters were precisely similar.

A few more visits and they came to a pair of high doors which, evidently, from the constant uproar resounding within, formed the entrance to an iron foundry.

“You must secure this vote, Mr. Avondale,” said his conductor. “Tom Radford commands more votes—honest votes—than any one else in the town. He is a shrewd old fellow, who has risen from nothing, and who worked in early life in many parts of England. He is great on engineering, and

perhaps you can get round him on that point. He is a Radical to the aristocracy and a Tory to trade-unionism." They went into the yard and encountered the proprietor in his shirt sleeves, directing half-a-dozen men who were shifting some pipes. His features were hard, but not repelling, his grizzled locks told that nigh sixty summers had passed over him, but his eye was bright, and his lips set resolutely, and his whole appearance proclaimed him one of those men who have built up their own fortunes and at the same time built up the England of the present day.

"Mornin', Mr. Taylor," he said shortly, "mornin', gentlemen."

"My friends would like to look over your works, if you have no objection, Mr. Radford," said Mr. Taylor.

"None at all, if they can find anything worth seeing."

"I have been telling them how twenty years ago your place was nothing but a smithy, and a heap of tumble down houses"—rather a cram this of Mr. Taylor—"and they wish to see your creation, and to hear how you got together skilful workmen in such a town as ours."

“Pooh, Mr. Taylor; you are coming it too strong. I always suspect a lawyer’s good opinion, and I dare say now one of these gentlemen is your new candidate?” and he gave Avondale a keen glance, as much as to say “you are the man.”

“Ah, Radford, it is no use trying to come round you,” replied Taylor, as he introduced his two companions. “I might have known you would guess our errand, for your cuteness has passed into a proverb.”

Radford smiled grimly, and the lawyer and Avondale were both assured that they had secured a hearing with him.

“But the new candidate would really much like to inspect the establishment.”

“Yes, sir, I take a great interest in engineering,” said Avondale.

“Glad to hear it, sir,” said Radford; “and hope if you get into the House you will keep up your liking.”

From engineering the conversation turned to mining and ironworks, with which Avondale was well acquainted, and, as a consequence, made a favourable impression on Radford; and then to

workmen, trades-unions, and strikes, against the latter of which Radford was particularly hot.

“ You see that man there with the big hammer? Well, his wages run to 50s. a week. He is skilful and strong, but given to drink. He is never here Monday, and would be in tatters if I did not keep back quarter of his money, and give it to his wife, a nice, hard-working woman as any man could have. Then look at that thin-featured little fellow. He wants education of a different sort. He has his head crammed full of trades-union humbug ; thinks every master a tyrant. He is a quick, useful chap, but always trying to overreach you. However, as long as he does not spout in my shops, I don’t mind. He won’t vote for you, whoever else does.”

All this while Mr. Radford had been accompanying his visitors through the different sheds, and pointing out the most interesting features. Returned to the office—

“ Now, Mr. Avondale, we will say a few words about your election, which, I dare say, will anyhow, just now, be most to your mind. But I am rather thirsty, and I suppose you are the same.”

He took out of a cupboard four or five glasses,

of a size seldom seen, save in the houses of some old topers. Avondale absolutely shuddered at them, feeling that he could not refuse the enormous draught without giving offence, but feeling equally certain that the effort would entail a splitting headache for the rest of the day. Jardine, however, being, from his cricket proclivities, more enured to Bass and Burton, was amused at his friend's dismay, though he was not altogether free from mental disturbance when he considered that it was not yet noon, and that if these were their host's ordinary drinking utensils he might be inclined to replenish them more than once. Radford filled three of the vessels—glasses would be a misnomer.

“You won't take anything, Mr. Taylor, I suppose. You lawyers are always afraid of the cup handle.”

“No, thanks—but don't forget that Mr. Avondale is a lawyer too—a barrister;” replied Taylor, commiserating the latter's distress.

“Is he? Well, he will, no doubt, drink success at his own election.”

Thereupon he drained his glass, refilled, and immediately began to gauge his visitor's political

principles. They agreed on most points—Education—the Church, though Radford was a Dissenter—better administration of the Poor Law—reduction of military and naval expenditure—but, while Avondale wished to improve the House of Lords, Radford would abolish it altogether. He was great, too, on Emigration, and thought it the only real means of elevating the lower class. Knew Rowe and Jardine well enough by name, and considered it fortunate they were in the House ; was much pleased when he learnt that he was talking with a son of the latter, and, for the rest of the interview, showed himself much more favourably disposed towards Avondale. An hour quickly flew by, and the one o'clock bell sounded for the dinner hour.

“ Well, gentlemen, I won't keep you longer, as you have many calls to make, unless you will have some of Figgs' 'taters and bacon with me. Figgs won't vote for you, Mr. Avondale, unless you can get round his wife. I will attend your meeting—to-morrow evening, at seven, I think you said, Taylor? I will support you if I can, at least against that ass Starrett. I would put up against him myself if no one else came forward.

Take another glass—why, you have not finished the second yet. But I dare say I am more used to it than you. Hard work of all kinds, hot and cold, wet and dusty, have seasoned me, though I hate drunkenness as much as a canting teetotaller.”

When they got into the street, Taylor said joyfully—

“ We have done a good day’s work. I believe he is secured, and if so, and the voting is fairly carried out, he would turn the scale. Come on, we will lunch at Irving’s, and tell him how you are getting on. Radford’s ale was more than enough for you, but he is no drunkard ; though, for the matter of that, it is doubtful if he could get drunk. You look done up, but the foundry itself is hot and dusty, and a wash will put you to rights again.”

Radford’s works were in the suburbs, close to the river, and almost out of the town. Mr. Irving’s house was a little farther on. He had just begun lunch, and was glad to see his visitors. Avondale cooled his head in the wash-hand basin, and rapidly recovered himself at lunch, under the badinage of Mr. Irving and his family,

so that before the meal was over the evil effects of Mr. Radford's hospitality had passed away.

"So you did not find hard-headed Tom such a bear, after all?" asked Mr. Irving.

"Not in the least, sir. He was most genial; in fact, a little too much so."

"He brought out those formidable goblets," explained Taylor.

"Did he now?" laughed Irving. "It was a favourable token. He brought out one of them for Rose once."

"He did not, papa," exclaimed Miss Rose. "It is too bad of you to say so. But he did offer me £5 for my old women's club, which is more than I got anywhere else; and when I said a sovereign would be sufficient, he told me at least to take a couple."

"I think he has many sterling good qualities," said Avondale.

"Not the least doubt of it," said Mr. Irving. "Had his stars been slightly more favourable he would have been another James Watt, or George Stephenson; though, perhaps, that is saying almost too much. It is not so much genius that he has, as bull-dog determination, and English

common sense. He has made a fortune in the last few years, and his business would fetch a good round sum. He owns, too, parts of several collieries across the bay, in Siluria. He has three sons—the eldest is with a civil engineer in London, the second is at Cambridge, and the youngest he intends, I think, to keep at home. I should not be in the least surprised if he were to come forward himself, some fine day, for Parliament.”

“He said, half joking, he would oppose Starrett if no one else did.”

“I am not surprised at it. He considers Starrett a ranting demagogue—and so he is—trying to win the poorer voters by cringing, and, where that will not answer, by bribery. Radford is almost Republican on some points, but he thinks the franchise is too low, and he hates corruption. He has many fine traits, and the finest, perhaps, is, that if he is hard-headed in driving a bargain, he is equally hard-headed in keeping his promise.”

“And he is not hard-hearted, papa,” said Miss Irving. “You know the Methodist Schools are, in a great part, kept up by him ; and he almost

maintains all the old and sick people in any way connected with his workmen."

"I suppose," asked Taylor, "we had better have the meeting at the Royal George? The Tories are there this evening, and, of course, Brown will be equally willing to let us have the room to-morrow."

"Yes, it will be best for a preliminary assembly. Of course we shall not muster very strongly, no need to do so at first, only just enough to form a committee, and so on. I have seen Jackson and one or two others this morning. By the by, do you think Everett will really put up?"

"I believe so. I dare say it will be settled to-night. If he does there will be warm work, though I don't imagine he has any chance. Starrett will, probably, secure a seat, while the other will be between Mulgrave and our friend. Everett will not unlikely petition, and so save us, in case of defeat, the invidious task; but the *exposée* will be something dreadful."

"From the bottom of my heart, I hope he will," exclaimed Irving. "The majority of the constituency are rotten to the core, and ought to be shown up. But what annoys me, more than

anything, is that my own workmen tell me—and other employers the same—almost to my face, that capitalists are tyrannical, and exacting, and harsh, and God knows what else, and at their prayer meetings the snuffling hypocrites laud themselves for their saintliness and humility, while they hold us up as children of the devil on the sure road to perdition, and, yet, when election comes round, the sanctimonious scoundrels will take bribes from two candidates, and, at the last moment, will pocket another sum from a third, and perhaps finally vote for a fourth. Excuse my speaking rather warmly, Mr. Avondale.”

“I fully understand your feelings,” said the latter. “I thoroughly respect good, honest dissent, but self-righteousness and bigotry are altogether a different matter.”

“I am afraid,” interrupted Taylor, “we must ask Mrs. Irving to excuse our running away. We must see a few more people this afternoon, as to-morrow, being market, they will be then engaged.”

“Quite right—don’t let us detain you. But don’t forget Figgs, Mr. Avondale,” said Mr.

Irving, referring to a local oddity in the shape of an alderman who, some six months previously, when a municipal debate had lasted to two o'clock, asked—"Mr. Major, had we better put this off and go home before the 'taters and bacon get gold?"

"And, please Mr. Taylor, don't allow Mr. Avondale to forget Mr. and Mrs. Snooks and daughters," added Miss Rose, laughing maliciously at the solicitor.

"Of course not, my dear young lady; and I won't forget to introduce him to the interesting Curate at the new church, who has such melancholy eyes, and such a lovely voice," replied the latter, paying her back in her own coin.

CHAPTER III.

THE afternoon was but a repetition of the morning's proceedings, and varied not in the slightest from what every would-be member goes through. Avondale proved himself such an adept in the art of canvassing as to surprise his guide. Patiently listening to the "experience" of one worthy citizen, astonished at the wisdom of another, commiserating the indigestion of a third, convinced by the masterly reasoning of a fourth, grave with the serious, pleased with the sportive, gay with the witty, agreeing with most, differing from few, contradicting none, he manifested such a thorough acquaintance with the theory and practice of humbug as is usually acquired only after years spent in the "service of one's country," and in the business of life; and he left such an impression on most of his hearers as would need for its effacement, the influence of an agent still more potent than mere flattery, of

an agent whose efficacy, openly declared at Waterbridge, is acknowledged not ambiguously in many other quarters. The interview with the Snookses was an interesting, though in a different way as that with Mr. Radford. Mr. Taylor left them at the gate leading into the lawn—the house being a few yards back from the road—having promised to dine with them at six o'clock, and saying that when they got inside they would, doubtless, understand why he, a single man, found it necessary to go back to his office.

Our two friends were shown into a drawing-room which seemed, though the thermometer outside stood at ninety degrees, to strike chill. There was a coldness and stiffness about the arrangement of the furniture, the disposition of music on the piano, and the display of prints and sketches on the walls, which instantaneously affected the visitor. Nor did the beauty of the sketches remove this feeling. Amongst them figured conspicuously a "Water girl," bony and gaunt, by Rosa Maria Snooks ; a "Dog's head," more resembling a mop, by Jemima Sarah Snooks ; a "Vase," ready to tumble over, by Dorothy Jane Snooks ; a "Lady's head," fright-

fully squinting, by Adelina Mary Ann Snooks ; a " Landscape," all dirty sky and muddy water, by Tabitha Rachel Snooks ; a " Man and Horse," said man considerably stouter than the horse, by Maud Ellen Ruth Snooks ; a something—a river—or perhaps a road—with a boat—or a carriage—lying across it, by Bathsheba Hester Snooks.

" By Jove," said Jardine, " this looks decidedly more serious than Radford's ale. I vote we cut, Walter."

They had waited about ten minutes, during which there had been a terrible amount of opening and shutting of doors, when the rustling of dresses announced the approach of their receivers. In they filed in long procession. "*Quel troupeau !*" muttered Avondale, while trying to assume a smile which would degenerate into a sardonic grin. First came a woman with the wrinkled face of sixty, and the hair and chignon of five-and-twenty. She announced herself as Mrs. Snooks, bobbed a curtsy to Avondale and Jardine in turn, said she was delighted with the h—h—honour of their call, and then proceeded to introduce each after each her " dahters," from

Tabitha Rachel, a simpering lass of thirty-six, down to Maud Ellen Ruth, a sullen-looking vixen of seventeen. The somewhat lengthened ceremony over, the party seated themselves with the apparent intention of remaining so for some time. Avondale, learning that the paterfamilias was not at home, tried to get away, but in vain—Mr. Snooks would be in directly, wished much to see Mr. Avondale, and would be quite angry if he missed the opportunity—and so the latter was, perforce, compelled to wait. Conversation did not flag, though it was not altogether of an enlivening character. The ladies divided their attentions pretty equally. Jemima, Sarah, Dorothy Jane, and Adelina Mary Ann fixed upon Jardine, while the others fluttered around Avondale. In this case our hero, from his experience of Mrs. and the Misses Simpkinses, had as much the advantage of Jardine as the latter had of him in respect of the ale in the morning.

After a few remarks, Miss Tabitha asked “If Mr. Taylor had not accompanied them?”

“Yes,” said Avondale; “but he had to go back to the office. He was very sorry, and

wished me to convey to you his regrets for being unable to remain."

"That is just like him," replied Miss Tabitha. "He is always paying me some compliment or other. At our bazaar in May, for the Sunday school, he said my hair was the most beautiful in the town, and that I ought to cut it off and sell it for the charity."

The woman is surely slightly crazy thought Avondale.

"You mistake, Tabitha," objected Bathsheba Hester. "He said mine was much more glossy than yours."

"Oh, no, my dear, you forget. What he said was that yours is so thin, that if it were really glossy it would not fetch anything."

"Mr. Taylor is very underhand—I don't like him at all," said Rosa Maria. "He told Mr. de Hautville that you both would believe any amount of nonsense."

Here, while Avondale was looking amazed at the *tres amicæ sorores*, and secretly rejoicing at the prospect of a general scrimmage, the mother interposed.

“ ‘Ave you seen Mr. dee Ovell yet, Mr. Happleprie—Mr. Havondale, I mean ; I forgot—I ’ave just been making a gooseberry pie, and so the word came sudden into my mouth. He is a nice young man, with such heyes ; he’s fell in love, so people say, with our Maria.”

“ Oh, mamma,” ejaculated Maria, trying to blush.

“ I am not at all surprised at his choice,” said Avondale. “ It would, indeed, be a wonder if he had not”—at which somewhat strong dose of flattery Maria did colour a little, while Tabitha and Bathsheba appeared inclined to scratch said Maria.

Meanwhile poor Jardine was in agony. He felt himself in the hands of Gorgons, and had seriously, two or three times, meditated a rush for the door. At last he unconsciously alluded to music, when Jemima Sarah, a damsel stout, though short, whose age might be anything under forty, incontinently volunteered to favour him with a song, and, ere he could object, had taken possession of the music-stool, and was asking what he would like.

“ ‘The Bridge,’ Mr. Jardine? But that

sounds better at night. Or ‘Home they brought her Warrior dead,’ or ‘I am the Spirit of Light?’ ”

“Yes, dear,” said her mother, who kept her eye on both sides like a general watching the two wings of his army, “Mr. Garden would be sure to like that.”

Then to Jardine, “My daughter has sung that song several times at our concerts, and the folks do like it so. She is romantic and lively, and throws such empathy into it. Go on, Jemima,” and Jemima did go on.

(*Prestissimo.*)

“Oh, I am the spirit of li——ght!
And I come with the dawning day,”

(*Very prestissimo.*)

“To scatter the dews, and gladness diffu——se,
As I speed on my joyous wa——y!!!”

It would be impossible to describe the performance. The first and third lines were got over at a frightful rate, and the second and fourth at scarcely less speed, the last word “way” taking up as much time as all the rest together. The pitch, too, varied in a wonderful manner, the greater part of each verse being screamed out in shrillest treble, but the voice at the end dropping down into a low bass, melodious as the final yelp

of a bad-tempered dog sleeping in the open air on a raw cold winter's night. Avondale and Jardine listened astounded, longing, though not venturing, to stop their ears, but their bewilderment being mistaken for approbation, aroused in the breasts of the other Graces hot feelings of envy, and ere the singer had concluded she was ejected from her seat and replaced in turn by the others, till the stock of songs was exhausted. Then the "drawings" and the "work" were brought out. The time ran rapidly. Six o'clock sounded, the hour appointed for their dinner. The unfortunate adventurers were in despair; they had made repeated attempts to get off, but to no purpose, and it seemed they would have to await Snooks' return, whenever that might be. To add to their discomfiture the tea-things now made their appearance, and they had the pleasure of waiting upon the eight beauties.

"Mon Dieu!" muttered Avondale to Jardine, "Que peut se faire? Je meurs de faim; et celles-ci, Diable les emporte!"

At last, a few minutes after half-past six, a note was brought Avondale. He read it hurriedly.

“Extremely sorry, Mrs. Snooks, to be obliged to tear myself away, but Mr. Taylor wants me at once. He has some gentlemen wishing to see me, so that I cannot stay. Good evening.”

The ladies were plunged into sorrow.

“But Mr. Jardine is not wanted too?”

“I suppose not,” said Avondale maliciously, but intending to keep his friend there only a few minutes longer for the sake of the joke. Then bowing to the whole tribe, he disappeared, rejoicing like a man who has just finished six months on the treadmill.

At the “Royal George” Taylor received Avondale with an expression of countenance that told plainly enough he had been enjoying himself with the thoughts of how the latter had spent the afternoon.

“My dear sir, you do not seem over pleased with your last call. I am afraid they have been treating you badly; but where is Mr. Jardine?”

“Oh, I left him behind for the fun of it—said you did not want him, and that he need not therefore withdraw himself from such interesting company. Poor fellow, his situation during the last two hours has been about as agreeable as

that of an Indian at the stake while his foes are heaping up the wood round him preparatory to the fire; and then the look he gave me, half horror, half abjection, as I escaped from the den. It was really too good," and Avondale laughed heartily, consoling himself for his own recent misery with the idea of the still greater torture his friend was now undergoing. Recovering himself in a minute or two—

"It won't do to leave Stuart there any longer, or he will never forgive me. He will go crazy and jump out of the window or do something equally rash. You must scribble another note, Mr. Taylor."

"How could you have been so cruel, Mr. Avondale. 'A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind,' is the saying, but it seems to have hardened your heart. Poor Mr. Jardine, it is too bad. One young man in the hands of eight females. I presume you were so lucky as to meet with the whole lot? and such females! An hour in their company would be penance enough to atone for a year's sins. Poor Mr. Jardine, we won't keep him there longer."

He touched the bell, asked for some paper, and

wrote the necessary release. But before it was sealed, in burst the object of their solicitations. He executed a maniacal dance round the room as a *pas de joie*, seizing one chair as a partner, upsetting several others in his progress, then jumped over the table, and finally squared up to Avondale.

“Now, sir, are you not ashamed of yourself? And what excuses would you have made to my revered parents if the result of your detestable machinations had been to land me in a lunatic asylum?”

Without waiting for a reply he went through a similar series of evolutions, while Taylor and Avondale laughed uproariously at his antics, concluding with an attempt at a break-down dance, and then at length seating himself through sheer exhaustion in an easy chair.

“Well, Mr. Walter Avondale, M.P. in prospective of the honourable borough of Waterbridge, what have you to say why I should not summon you to give more full and complete satisfaction?”

“I am very sorry, Stuart, if you will believe me. But it will be such a fine joke for Mary

that I could not avoid playing it on you. You looked so thoroughly woe-begone with Jemima Tabitha on one side and Bathsheba Dorcas on the other," and the speaker went off into another fit of laughter.

"Never mind, Mr. Jardine," said Taylor, "you must make a few strange experiences before you get full knowledge of character. We had, however, just written a note for you, here it is. But how did you get away; what excuse did you contrive?"

"None at all. The door was left open; I managed to get round near it, and then rushed out; I ran like wild down the lawn, and jumped the gate at the bottom as it seemed to be locked, and I was afraid I should be retaken, and hastened here at once."

"But that is not the hat you were wearing this morning; you have brought away some other person's."

"I forgot. I was in such a hurry that I could not stop to search for my own, and so I turned into the first shop. The people looked astonished at me, thought I was an escaped lunatic, I suppose. Do I appear much like one? I bought a

felt hat as it is much lighter than a high crowner this weather."

"There was a rather wild expression about your eyes as you came in, but it is gone now."

"Glad to hear you say so. But it is no joking matter. I should positively have lost my senses if those female torturers had kept me another hour—ugh! I am wretchedly hungry, and so was Walter just now."

"Dinner will be up directly. I took the liberty on my way to the office of ordering it for you at half-past six, feeling sure how matters would turn out. I came here at a quarter-past, and as you were not in, I directed the host to bring it up a little before seven, and here it comes. You will find it good. Host Brown has a wide reputation for his cuisine, and he will be on his mettle to win the approbation of two London swells."

"His efforts will be lost on me, though I certainly shall appreciate anything in the shape of food. I am grimed with dust and perspiration; do you know the way to our room, Walter?"

A short space sufficed for their toilette, and

they sat down to a dinner which bore high testimony to the merits of Host Brown's cook, and to which hunger enabled them to do ample justice. As soon as the keenness of the appetite had been taken off, conversation which had flagged was again renewed. It turned almost inevitably on the Snookses, and each was bantered in turn by the other two. Jardine received the first attack, and Taylor exploded with merriment at Avondale's description of the desperate efforts he had made to look amused, of the song Miss Jemima sang for his especial behoof, and of the "emputy," alias emphasis, she threw into it, and finally of the ghastly smile he put on while handing round the cake and tea, at the hour appointed for their own dinner. Next Mr. Taylor was told how deeply interested the two eldest daughters were in him, and how his neat compliments at the bazaar had been treasured up, and had well-nigh led to a fight between the two favoured beauties.

"Confound their impudence," he exclaimed savagely, "I never said half-a-dozen words to the lot. But what was that about Mr. Ovell?"

Tell me again ; it will be of service for paying off Miss Rose Irving."

Avondale was almost impregnable. The most salient point in his armour was the new name "Happlepie," with which Mrs. Snooks had dubbed him.

"Didn't the sweet cherubs look disgusted when she informed us she had been making a gooseberry pie?" said Jardine. "The half-closed eyes of one—Maria Rachel, I think—shut completely. Hester's or Dorothy's turned-up nose went into a more decided curl. Dorcas' left optic, always on ill terms with its neighbour, made a half face to the left, while the other performed a similar evolution to the right, the result on the whole being somewhat remarkable. Then Tabitha's delicate expostulation—'Ma, we are not now engaged in culinary operations!' was excellent. Thackeray ought to have made the acquaintance of such a family."

"Who are these people?" asked Avondale.

"The father is a corn-dealer," replied Taylor ; "a most respectable and sensible man, as is his eldest son, who is in partnership with him. He came into the town five or six years ago. He had

previously rented a mill at Mayford, four miles up the river. He did a good business there, but these foolish women would come here to get husbands. Their success in that line has not been very great yet, but they put the old man to expense, more I think than he can well bear, and I should not be in the least surprised if he had to shift back to the mill, which he has still kept on."

Dinner over and a bottle of Brown's oldest Madeira discussed, Taylor proposed that they should walk out to Mr. Rosse's, to give him an account of the day's work. He was very glad to see them, and Avondale had plainly got up considerably in his estimation. A rather numerous company had assembled to talk over what would be for the next week or two the engrossing topic. Avondale aroused the goodwill, even of those who were inclined to object to his youth, and his narrative of his canvassing created much amusement. Radford was considered by one and all an important ally. Everything for the next evening's meeting was arranged, and the names of those willing to act on the committee were put down.

“You had better dine at the ‘King William,’ to-morrow,” said Captain Wright, a small landed proprietor in the neighbourhood. “It is the farmer’s house of call, and a good many of them have votes, as the boundaries of the borough go out into the country. I will, if you like, go with you, and introduce you to some of them, though I think most of them will go for either Everett, the Tory, or Starrett, the butterman.”

Avondale expressed his thanks, and thus the morrow’s course was settled.

CHAPTER IV.

BEFORE the middle of the next day Mr. Everett's address was out. He lived at Moreton Grange, some miles north of Waterbridge, and was the owner of a large portion of the country surrounding the town, but in it he had comparatively little direct influence. A town lying in a rich agricultural district could not, however, be free from Tory predilections ; his father had been, up till his death, five years previously, one of its representatives. He had, as already mentioned, contested the last election with Percy Mulgrave, with the sole result of adding to the mass of corruption in which the borough was steeped. He now came forward again "invited to do so by a very numerous signed requisition. He was a thorough supporter of the union of Church and State, but was equally anxious to see the same political privileges extended to deserving persons of every grade in society, and of all religious

views—and so on, and so on,” *a la* the manifesto drawn out by Baker, Thorn, Southton, and Co., for the guidance of sucking politicians entrusted to their care and direction.

So many attended Avondale’s meeting that it was necessary to adjourn from the private room, which it was thought would have sufficed, to the much more commodious ball-room. Mr. Rosse introduced him, and expressed his own surprise and pleasure at the large number who had, on such a short notice, come together. He referred to Avondale’s ancestors, mentioned the share several had taken in the politics of their day, stated briefly his career at college, and concluded by declaring he had resolved to confine his disbursements to strictly legitimate expenses—words which elicited general cheering.

Avondale got up. He felt rather nervous, but his nerves were always under the control of his cool head, and especially he knew how greatly his whole future would depend on the way he now comported himself, and the expressions to which he gave utterance. His manly figure, easy bearing, and intellectual face, paler than usual, but illumined by the light in his eyes, won for

him a sympathetic audience, and their attention deepened as his speech proceeded. After very shortly apologising for his youth, but reminding his hearers of the great men whose youth had been so renowned, he described generally the present state of politics. He ran over the history of our country during the last few years, considered in connection with the history of foreign countries with whose interests our own have been in conflict, or unisance. This enabled him to mark the comparative advance or retrogression we had made, to point where foreign policy had erred or succeeded, and to comment upon the position we now held in the opinion of the world at large. Then he reviewed, one by one, the various social questions more or less imperatively demanding legislation, commenting upon the urgency and importance of each, and pointing out the best modes of dealing with them. Next he took up the relations, in many respects unsatisfactory, existing between the different parts of the empire, and especially between the mother country and the colonies. He strongly upheld the need of tightening, and not relaxing, the bonds joining them—alluding, in passing, to the

fact that on his left was a son of Mr. Jardine, one of the best known Australian statesmen—dwelt on the need we have of a refuge for our surplus population, urged that the colonies, if not allies, might easily become carping rivals, and depicted the vast empire which in the future might be built up on existing foundations, an empire which would be a sure guarantee that freedom should not be without a protector. Out of these materials he evolved a line of policy which he thought Parliament ought to pursue; then sketched the attitude of the two great parties, and showed there was much ground for complaint in the tenets of each; said he would give a general, but independent support to the Maitland Ministry; and sat down, after a speech of an hour and half's duration, which was often interrupted by cheering, and was loudly applauded at its close.

Mr. Irving proposed a resolution, stating that the assembly were fully satisfied with Mr. Avondale's sentiments, and that they accorded him their support, and would strive to place him at the head of the poll. He said he fully concurred in every word his friend had spoken, and was

equally surprised and gratified at the intimate acquaintance with history and general politics his speech evinced, and at the ease and fluency with which it had been delivered. He was also greatly pleased with the statement made by Mr. Rosse, and which, of course, Mr. Avondale would directly confirm before they broke up, that the contest was to be carried on throughout with the determination, whatever might be the result, of not spending one halfpenny but in a manner allowed by law.

Mr. Benton, a banker and borough magistrate, seconded the resolution, in a short speech that but reiterated what Mr. Irving had already said.

Mr. Radford also gave it his adhesion. His rising was the signal for much applause, for his good qualities were thoroughly appreciated by his fellow burgesses, while, as he never joined in the parliamentary or municipal contest, his appearance on this occasion added weight to his authority. He also fully concurred in most of Avondale's speech. But, beyond this he hardly considered the gentleman had done himself justice. His knowledge of the internal resources of the nation was not inferior to his familiarity

with bygone generations, or foreign political plottings; and then he gave an account of yesterday's conversation. He (Radford) thought the former information was quite as important as the latter, while, as a rule, M.P.s were profoundly ignorant of it. He then spoke very sharply of the scandalous practices that had occurred at some elections, and rejoiced to hear that this would be, at least on one side, untainted by bribery—indeed, under any other circumstances he would not have had anything to do with it.

Four or five others having spoken to the same effect, the resolution was put, and, of course, carried unanimously.

Avondale thanked the meeting for their patient hearing, and for the encouragement they had given him, and explained that he had forborne to say how he had resolved to conduct his canvass till it was settled he should come forward. He could add nothing to what Mr. Rosse had said at the commencement, and it was altogether unnecessary to do so—the mere circumstance of Messrs. Rosse and Taylor being his agents would be a sufficient proof to all that one pure election would be attempted at Waterbridge.

Mr. Rosse then advised that a committee be formed, and the majority present gave in their names. They composed a list strong in respectability and position, but, as Avondale and his solicitors and active supporters were fully aware, the smaller voters at Waterbridge far outnumbered the better class, and it was they who on every occasion finally decided the return.

It was past ten ere the meeting separated. The night mail left a little before eleven, and by it Avondale and Jardine returned to London. He thanked Irving, Radford, and the solicitors most heartily for their assistance, placed all other arrangements in the hands of the latter, and promised, nothing preventing, to come down again on Tuesday, and remain till the fight was over.

CHAPTER V.

OUR two friends reached London by four o'clock, just as the summer sun was rising. They went to Mr. Jardine's, and after three or four hours' sound sleep, made their appearance at the breakfast-table, none the worse for the ride. Miss Avondale had come up on the preceding Thursday, in accordance with the prior arrangements. She was in good health, enjoying her visit, and had already won the favourable opinion of her hosts. All the family were anxious to hear an account of the proceedings; and Avondale did his best to satisfy their curiosity. He was at all times an excellent narrator, and he did not now fail. The ladies were naturally inquisitive on every point. The town itself, its situation and neighbourhood, its streets and public buildings had to be sketched. Then Messrs. Rosse and Taylor, Irving and Radford, and the other prominent electors, whose acquaintance they had

made, were passed in review. Finally came the inevitable Snookses—Avondale could not omit them—and then the laughter aroused by the general relation, culminated in most indecorous peals, as he depicted the utter desolation manifested by Jardine when left helpless and alone in the hands of his persecutors, and how in a few minutes he made his escape, regardless of all propriety, fleeing hatless and vaulting the gate, in dread lest he should be retaken. Merciless was the bantering Jardine received, but he took it all in good part, and to some extent turned the tables on Avondale, by describing the latter's terror at the appearance of Mr. Radford's big glasses, and how, to conciliate the favour of such a supporter, he had striven manfully to swallow the mighty potation offered him.

As Avondale left, Mr. Jardine accompanied him to the door to have an opportunity of questioning him as to what were his real prospects of success.

“ Very good, if the election is to be decided honestly, but I fear that will not be the case.”

“ These solicitors are, of course, men of good standing? ”

“ Yes, undoubtedly, the best in the town.

FitzHenry was right in what he said of them. They evidently carry with them all the better sort, and have thus given me, at once, a fair position."

"And Starrett—what of him?"

"He is a member of Riston and Co., provision merchants in the city. Perhaps you know them? They do a large business with the farmers about Waterbridge. He is, himself, also owner of several coasting smacks. Thus he has a double hold on the borough; and as he has an easy flow of words and is willing to promise the populace everything they ask him, and perhaps will not stop at spending money, he will certainly secure many of the lowest votes, and, if not elected, will run the successful candidate very close."

"Mulgrave—what is his chance?"

"I can scarcely say. I have not had time enough to form an opinion. But he will go with Starrett; perhaps they will coalesce and have one committee. He is a Minister, that will carry some weight; but he has no personal influence, and it is beyond question, that a petition against his last election would have unseated him. The Conservative will, I think, be last, though not

far behind. Many of his votes, Rosse says, will be given to me. Altogether it must be a sharp fight, and I imagine no very great majority will separate him who heads the poll from him who comes last."

"Very likely. I wish you all success, and many others do the same. Your coming forward has created much interest and has been a pretty general topic of conversation the last few days. Mulgrave's appointment has produced much ill-will. He is considered, and, with justice, an incapable, and it is to his wife's machinations that it is attributed. If you can oust him, you won't have to complain of lack of congratulation. Well, good morning, I must not detain you. Stay ; Head is to be put over the Home Office."

"What, Blocke Head ! a more incapable man than Mulgrave, who left the education business in such a muddle for Herbert Williams to clear up."

"Yes, and Sloe will take the Board of Trade, Grantham making way for him by going to the Poor Law Department—and, and—what else ? Our good friend Mordaunt Tracy steps into

Mulgrave's shoes. You see the world has not stopped while you have been out of town."

"No, sir, evidently not. Is all this positively settled?"

"Not quite, but it will be this afternoon, and very probably it is stated semi-officially in to-day's 'Times.'"

Ruminating upon this intelligence, Avondale went off to his chambers, and then to Warfedale House. At Hyde Park Corner, he met the Earl of Wyversley.

"I have been wandering half over town for you," said the young Earl, "I went to your place early, and then, as you were not there, I thought there might be a chance you would be at Jardine's. They sent me on here, and so I have stumbled on you at last. I want an account of your adventures. By Jove! from the papers, I imagine you have been doing grand things. Stuart Jardine has been with you, too, he says. I am so ashamed of hanging about idle that I shall go down, when you return, to join *incog.* in an election. I imagine the whole affair must be amusing."

“ I hope you will, but I fear you will soon tire of it.”

“ Oh, no, and if I did, it could not last long ; not more than a fortnight at the outside.”

“ Besides, I was forgetting—it would be a breach of privilege on your part.”

“ So it would ; I forgot that. I hope you will cut out Mulgrave. What is your chance? ”

“ Well, as matters are, not good. I believe I should certainly be elected if bribery were dropped ; but, if the other side adopt that line, they can have enough votes to secure their return. If they do, of course the power is given one of petitioning.”

“ I trust, then, you will petition, or some one for you. It would be even better to get Mulgrave turned out after election, than for him to be directly defeated. His wife is such an overbearing woman, pushing herself forward everywhere. You know who she was ? Lady Wharfedale would be delighted to see her dignity in any way lowered. And that reminds me the Marquis wishes you to call on him when you return. Can you come to-night? ”

“ I suppose so, after dinner. I am engaged at

the Jardines'. I was going there now. But I am somewhat doubtful about going in the evening again without invitation. The Marquis may think me obtruding, and perhaps be inclined to snub me."

"Make yourself easy on that, my dear fellow. Of course, if he expected you to dinner, he would send you a formal invitation; and then, no doubt, he would have written, had he been certain when you would return. But now, he wishes you to come when most convenient in the morning, or late in the evening, after dinner. I will call for you — when will you be ready, ten o'clock, at Mr. Jardine's.

"Yes."

"That is settled then. You have heard the news; but here is one of the new dignitaries, Mordaunt Tracy."

Tracy stopped and shook hands with them. He was apparently as anxious to talk with Avondale as some time previously he had been to pass him by. He congratulated him on the result of his canvass, and presumed that, with Mr. Mulgrave's assistance, he would have a good chance of election. Avondale "had not the pleasure of

the honourable gentleman's acquaintance, and was not aware his elevation to a higher post was decided on."

"Yes. His address was out last evening. But you were so occupied with your meeting as not to hear anything about it. According to the telegram, you will be an addition to the debating power in the House. By the by, is Mr. FitzHenry's influence of much benefit at Waterbridge?"

"What do you mean?"

"I thought he was bringing you forward. Your agents there are friends of his, are they not?"

"I really cannot comprehend, Mr. Tracy, what you are asking," said Avondale rather warmly. "My solicitors have likely enough business connections with Mr. FitzHenry. His reputation is sufficient to secure him a client in every town. As to his bringing me forward, if you took the trouble to read my address, you will see that I am distinctly independent both as to political party and to local aid. I am fighting my own battle. Mr. FitzHenry would no more think of appearing as my champion, than he would of ex-

pressing his opinion as to the stability of the present Government, or to the foresight displayed by those who are now joining it."

Tracy bit his lips, and, after some commonplace remarks anent the weather, passed on.

"Very good, Walter," said Wyversley, laughing; "you hit him rather hard at the last. But you should have drawn him out a little more; and you did not either congratulate him on his taking silk, as you lawyers say, or allow me the opportunity of doing so."

"I really forgot it. His patronising tone grated rather harshly, and I don't like being pumped in that manner where a few incautious words would involve others besides yourself in a mess. In fact, as any one could see, he did not want information about my election, but about the people who have given me their countenance and support."

"Served him right. I am surprised that he has joined the Government. I do not think—though my ideas on the matter are not worth much—that it will hold together through next session. You know, of course, who is to be the new President of the Board of Trade? How will

his sentiments tally with those of His Grace of Bayswater?"

"Not very closely, I imagine. There is no doubt, however, that Bayswater is of less value to Maitland than Sloe. We English have never been grand at Foreign Ministers. Somehow or other we do not seem to take kindly to international statecraft; have not naturally deceit and fraud enough in our system to deal successfully with the fellows who have grown grey-haired in the service of Russia or Austria, diplomatists who have reduced dissimulation to a science and lying to a system. Take the petty German and Italian States, for instance. They are always trying to overreach each other. A petty princelet of Hesse This or That has to maintain the dignity of an independent Sovereign, and to keep his officers of state. This is alone a costly and difficult business. Then he has to secure that his position is properly recognised at other courts, a matter requiring much tact and perseverance; and, finally, he has to make some arrangements for his sons and daughters, who, poor beggars, being of royal blood, must, forsooth, be married to creatures similarly endowed."

“Go on, Radical, I like to hear you, who have such a contempt for king mob and such a respect for hoary antiquity, practically exemplifying your doctrines by passing a level over high and low.”

“Not so. I should be the last to loosen the foundations of society; but can a multitude of royal dignitaries—not nobles simply, remember, but people constituting a distinct, separate, inaccessible class, divided by a gulf, clearly defined and impassable, from the rest of the community—can a multitude of such be a safeguard for civil order? Does not common sense tell you that the less of them the better for the world and the better for themselves? Put it to yourself: were you monarch of your own county, do you believe you would find it easy to sustain the expense of a court and the rest of the paraphernalia?”

“Not very likely. As it is, I am drifting towards bankruptcy.”

“And if England were parted out in ten or twelve sovereignties, could that conduce to its advancement and progress, or increase the comfort of its people?”

“Of course not. You know my opinion on

that is much the same as yours. But what were you saying about our Foreign Ministers?"

"We have rather wandered away from them. I was only going to add that for the last 100 years hardly one has been, as regards his particular subject, worth his salt. Palmerston was, perhaps, the best, though he has met with a vast amount of undeserved commendation. It was not skill in negotiation or prescience in the hidden causes influencing men's acts that earned for him his reputation, but solely his knowledge of England and Englishmen, and his determination to uphold, at any cost, the honour of his country. This was a sentiment which, twenty years ago, had greater weight than now with us, or his application of *civis Romanus sum* to Britons in foreign lands would not have elicited the enthusiastic cheering it did in the House of Commons, nor have drawn an equally enthusiastic response from the nation. Did you ever read that speech?"

"I? No, my dear fellow. That is almost an unnecessary question."

"It ought not to be unnecessary then. Take my advice and read it. You will find it in 'Hansard' for April, 1848, I think. The whole

lot of speeches are worth reading, especially Gladstone's, who was then a Tory and in Opposition, although he died an advanced Radical. But we have passed the Western. Let us turn back. I am rather hungry and should be glad of some lunch. It is very noticeable that bad as has been the general quality of the Foreign Ministers, the Liberals have, save Palmerston, been far worse than the Tories. You know to what a pass we have come now. Meddling here and muddling there have created on the Continent the very prevalent belief that we have not one decent diplomatist left amongst us."

"And I cannot say the belief is far wrong."

"No. Just fancy such a noodle as Head being made Home Secretary. In truth, 'Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.' The Home Office is the most difficult department of all, and Head to be there. Ugh! Well, here we are at the Club, and I dare say we shall find some scraps of news flying about."

CHAPTER VI.

FROM the Jardines' Avondale, according to promise, accompanied Wyversley to Wharfedale House. The Marchioness was greatly delighted to see him, and deigned to tell Wyversley that for once he had evinced possession of a little memory and consideration. In a few minutes, however, the Marquis, hearing of his arrival, took him aside to learn what was the prospect of the election. Avondale told him exactly how matters stood.

"You cannot petition personally," said the Marquis, "let the bribery be as gross as it may. It would render you a marked man to start with, and it would look like a direct attack on Mulgrave."

"Of course not," assented Avondale. "But this Starrett is not liked by the better portion of the townsfolk, some of whom are really ashamed of the corruption around them. It may, there-

fore, very probably happen that if he pitches into one of my supporters too strongly, this one may petition on his own account. I think this is very likely to occur. Irving would be very glad to show up the Radicals, and so would others."

"I should not regret its being so—it would be so damaging to Maitland for one of his Cabinet to be unseated for improper conduct—not," he added, somewhat hastily, "that I have any personal feeling in the matter as regards either Maitland or Mulgrave."

"Of course not," replied Avondale, concealing a smile at the speaker's assumed indifference; "but, I presume, your lordship would not have the slightest objection to taking the direction of affairs, if so commanded by her Majesty."

"I? My dear sir, what do you mean?" ejaculated Wharfedale, with real or pretended amazement.

"Had we not better join the ladies?" asked Avondale. "Your lordship will lose your reputation for gallantry if you allow my poor affairs to occupy your attention in this renowned drawing-room."

The Marquis laughed.

“*Jouer gros jeu*, Avondale, and something must come of it. You say you leave town on Monday—no, Tuesday. I should like to have a talk with you, but I suppose I must wait till the election is over.”

Lady Wharfedale beckoned to Avondale as soon as the Marquis left him.

“Take a seat between those two ladies, if you can find room. Stay, I am forgetting; you met Mrs. de Spenser the last time you were here, but I don’t think Lady de Breaute knows you yet.” She introduced him to the stately eldest daughter of the Duke of Strathclyde. “And now you must give me an account of your adventures. I saw your speech the other day in the papers—and read it—so you may be sure how much interest I am taking in the contest.”

Avondale scarcely knew how to express his appreciation of the honour conferred by such a notice, and then went on with the account. His hearers were greatly amused by it, even Lady de Breaute, who had at first shown thorough indifference, and, indeed, a disposition to yawn. The interest increased as he proceeded, and the

smiles were followed by suppressed laughter, in which the Marquis and one or two other gentlemen, who had listened to the last part, joined unreservedly, as he described Jardine's escape from the Snookses'.

"Good, good, Mr. Avondale," exclaimed Sir Edward Wharton. "Your experience is very similar to what mine was when I first got in, fifteen or sixteen years ago, for Norham. I thought I should not survive the first attempt, but the next time I had a friend to help me, and he, being much better looking, and a capital talker, attracted the attention of the female part of the constituency—always the chief part of the fight, as the Marchioness is aware—and so both saved me a vast amount of soft speeches, and secured a number of votes."

"It is fortunate for you and me, Wharton," said the Marquis, "that the ladies are not electors. If so, we should stand no chance against such young fellows as Avondale, with their *distingué* appearance and their voluble tongues. But perhaps they will deign to favour us with a little music; has Mrs. de Spenser never a song to enliven us with?"

The lady addressed accepted Wharfedale's arm to the piano.

"Please let it be in a tongue understood by the commons," said Wharton.

" 'A southerly wind, &c.,' I suppose," Sir Edward.

"Oh, no, madam. Pray have some higher opinion of me than to think that I have no ear for anything but hunting ballads."

"I will try to satisfy you. Let me see, what do you like? Here it is, I believe—'The Night is still.' "

While the song was going on, Lady Wharfedale counselled our hero to try to secure the good graces of Lady de Breaute. The latter belonged to one of the oldest families in the kingdom. Her father was premier Duke. Five hundred years had his title been transmitted lineally down from father to son, his ancestor having been the solitary Peer who, during Elizabeth's reign, preserved his order from extinction. The first Earl of Strathclyde was one of Edward the First's bravest officers, and commanded a division of his army at Falkirk, in 1298. The

fourth Earl fought with the Black Prince seventy years later, at Najara, and was by the 3rd Edward raised to the Dukedom of Strathclyde, though, of course, it was then merely a titular dignity; he was, also, at the same time, advanced to the Earldom of Oswestry, which, as a barony, dated from the Conquest. The Duke had withdrawn from active participation in politics, as his aristocratic predilections were somewhat ruffled by finding that his chief rivals and competitors in that occupation were successful traders and manufacturers. He did not, however, altogether absent himself from Parliament, and his occasional speeches evinced a kindly disposition, if not a brilliant intellect. To his equals he was inclined to be proud and distant, but not overbearing; to his inferiors, and those in his employ, he was ever considerate; and his daughter inherited the same traits of character. She was in her 26th year, still unmarried, though certainly not from lack of offers or admirers. Her features were well-formed, and intellectual, and fixed Juno-like in calm repose, but, under the influence of Avondale's

ready tongue and delicate attention, they gradually relaxed their immobility, and their cold set became replaced by a pleasant smile.

“Who was that with the Jardines, yesterday?” asked the Marchioness of Wyversley.

“Ask Walter; he can tell you,” was the reply.

“Dear me, this is too bad,” exclaimed the questioner. “Mr. Avondale is referee in chief; but who was it? You must know; you were at Mr. Jardine’s just now.”

“It was Walter’s sister.”

“His sister! That explains how good your memory has suddenly become. I am very glad. Are there any more in the family?”

“No, I believe not.”

She congratulated Avondale on the relationship, and said she would take the earliest opportunity of calling upon Mrs. Jardine, in order to have the pleasure of making his sister’s acquaintance.

It seemed but a few short minutes more, and the company withdrew, barely saving the Sunday. Wyversley accompanied Avondale down Bond Street into Picadilly, as it was on the way to his own residence in Durham Square, where,

the Countess not being in town, he was living in comparative quiet. He hesitated a long time about it, but at last asked Avondale to go with him next Monday to see Auricoma. Walter scarcely liked doing so now that his sister was just come to London, but, being desirous to visit the modern Aspasia, and to discover, if possible, some means of rescuing his friend from the connection, he consented to accept the invitation, agreeing to meet him at the Houses of Parliament, and hear Mr. Maitland's explanation first.

CHAPTER VII.

MONDAY'S papers contained full accounts of the changes in the Cabinet. All the fresh arrangements had at length been completed at the Council held on Saturday. Considerable changes were introduced into the Treasury. The Minister of Finance was abolished, and in his stead were created a Chief Commissioner of Customs, Kelly, the late Minister of Finance, filling this post, and a Chief Commissioner of Inland Revenue, who was also to supervise " Woods and Forests," this office being given to Mr. Rowe.

Mr. Henry Blocke Head was to be Home Secretary. He was a man of fair abilities, but without the slightest energy or determination. His character was well shown in his first appointment. He had greatly contributed to the success of the Education Bill. He had comprehended fully and completely the faults in the then existing system, and had, in great part, drawn

out the new measure. Consequently it was natural that he should be selected to mould and build up the edifice he had called into being; but in this he utterly failed. He met with great opposition from the bulk of the masters of endowed schools, as well as from some members of Parliament, hostile to the scheme; he tried to please all parties, and, of course, pleased none; his administrative powers proved to be on a par with his resolution, or rather irresolution; though thoroughly versed in the details of the measure, he could not trace the faintest outline of the plan in which it was to be carried out; and, in the result, he resigned, leaving behind a chaos which taxed the utmost powers of his successor to get into order. He had recently exhibited in his speeches a leaning towards Radicalism, and had declared his unshaken confidence in the *ipse dixit* of the new Premier; and, doubtless, to these considerations he owed his elevation.

The Earl of Grantham may be thus summed up—a moderate Whig, who had been in the Upper House the last twelve years, and in the Lower House fifteen or sixteen years previously; some time since Under Secretary of the Home

Office, and, later, Vice-President of the Board of Trade, and the publisher of a volume of essays on Politics, said to have been written by his private secretary. His present appointment was a decided mistake. The administration of the Poor Law was the subject of very general complaint, and it required a statesman of firmness and prudence to improve it. For neither quality was the Earl of Grantham conspicuous above the average.

The other changes were, as we have said,—Mr. Jonathan Sloe, succeeding the Earl of Grantham; Algernon Lynworth, from the Irish Secretaryship to the Presidency of the Indian Board; Percy Mulgrave, from the Under Secretaryship of the Foreign Office to the vacancy thus made; and Mordaunt Tracy, to this latter vacancy.

The “Times” gave a qualified assent to the new arrangements. It was satisfied with the Ministry, as a whole. Two of the fresh men, Sloe and Rowe, would, doubtless, secure the support of their own especial adherents; but it was very questionable how long they would remain on friendly terms, and how long the

former, a hasty and unreflecting speaker, would be able to confine his tongue within the limits allowed a Minister. Sir Robert Kerr was but poorly replaced by Sir Charles Lynworth, and Mr. Mulgrave, as they had previously intimated, was hardly the person fitted for Ireland in its present condition. Mr. Head had previously been tried and found wanting; but Mr Tracy would, probably, be of real assistance and service.

The opinions of the other dailies may be summed up in unqualified laudation by the "Morning Mercury" and the "Pioneer," abuse, qualified by lamentation, by the "Constitutional."

In the evening Maitland made his statement to a crowded house. He set forth the changes in the Ministry, and the immediate objects to which their attention would be turned—but he added little information to that already known.

Wyver'sley, Avondale, and Jardine were among his hearers. The two former, making an excuse to Jardine, and agreeing to breakfast with him next morning before Avondale left for Waterbridge, betook themselves to Chelsea.

CHAPTER VIII.

WYVERSLEY had a carriage waiting, and a smart drive of twenty minutes brought them to "Lily-bank," Auricoma's villa. Avondale had heard much of it, and was well aware that his friend never allowed expense to interfere in the least with any of his fancies; but he was fairly surprised at the beauty of the spot. The lawn was large and well supplied with trees; it had two fountains rising out of some pretty rockwork, and the numerous flower-beds were one mass of bloom. The house was on the banks of the Thames, looking down a bend of it; consequently from the windows there was an uninterrupted view of fully a mile of the water. A considerable company seemed to have arrived, for besides two or three groups who were on the lawn, shouts of laughter kept resounding through the open casements into the cool night. A billiard-table stood in the hall.

“Nobody playing, for a wonder,” said Wyversley.

On the left hand was the drawing-room, on the right the dining-room. Into the former Wyversley went ; Auricoma came hastily to meet him.

“I am so glad you are come, Reginald ; I was almost afraid you had been detained.”

“Oh, no, not at all ; Maitland took some little to get over his explanation. You see I have brought Avondale ; that would be excuse enough if I had been an hour later.”

“I shan’t flatter you and offend Mr. Avondale by saying it would not ; but Mr. Avondale will allow me to say I am extremely delighted with the honour of his presence.”

“Rather permit me to say the pleasure is all on my side,” returned Avondale.

“Here, Walter,” said Wyversley, “I must introduce you to Mr. Latymer, and, I think, Lady Adela Beauchamp.”

The gentleman nodded ; he was an old bachelor, a well-known man upon town, though his fastness had never taken him to regions of rascality. He was past the middle age, and had been in

early years an *attaché* at Naples and Milan. He and some others were now engaged in a game of unlimited loo with the young lady of the aristocratic name, and two more with similar high-sounding titles.

“Here is the lion of the hour,” directing Avondale’s attention to a young man not much older than himself.

“Mr. Cadogan. He is taking it easy enough on that lounge, but you know how he and Captain Delancourt roughed it last autumn, between Montreal and Vancouver. They ate everything they could eat, save one of Herbert’s boots, which they had carefully preserved for a final repast, when they stumbled on some out-of-the-way settlement.”

“I am rejoiced,” exclaimed Avondale, “to make your acquaintance. The town has been ringing with your exploits since you returned at the beginning of spring. It must have been a wonderful journey.”

“Don’t compliment me,” laughed Cadogan; “you will make me blush. But seriously, there was nothing in it. Any two strong fellows might

do the same, and by showing a little more foresight and care, with far less discomfort.”

“Discomfort, my dear fellow!” groaned Wyversley. “If the fellow boot was anything like that one you have at your rooms—”

“You have not seen it, Mr. Avondale,” exclaimed Auricoma. “You must see it. He has brought it me once. It is quite a curiosity, but I don’t think they could have eaten the other. It has a lot of great big nails in the sole, and there is a monstrous hole quite through the bottom, over which he has nailed a piece of wood; oh, it’s a most amusing boot.”

“It is a positive fact,” said Cadogan; “I assure you, whatever that young lady may think, we did eat three boots, that is, of course, minus the nails, and we relished them remarkably. In fact, we held several debates as to the advisability of devouring the soles too, before giving up. Of course it was only the upper leather we turned into pabulum, the bottom we tied under our feet sandal fashion to keep them from the rough ground. The whole boot we wore turn and turn about.”

“By Jove, it was a delightful trip,” said Wyversley.

“Why, Walter, it would almost have broken down your resolution.”

“Not unlikely, though it requires more courage to lie down and die than to struggle on.”

“Please don’t let us debate any longer about the great journey,” interrupted Auricoma. “It was very wonderful and all that—everybody says so—but it makes me quite uncomfortable to hear of persons being slowly starved,” and a little shudder shook her frame.

“However, Mr. Cadogan is quite recovered; he is lolling easily enough there. Pour him out another glass of wine, Mr. Avondale; perhaps you will take one yourself. That is old Madeira in the cut-class decanter, I would advise you to try it. The other is port, supposed to be ’47, but Mr. Latymer, who is always so polite, says it is not drinkable.”

“No, no, my dear madam, I merely said your wine merchant had put in a little, just a little, too much logwood when he manufactured this particular bin.”

“For shame, sir!”

“That is not improving matters with Auricoma,” laughed Wyversley, who had been investigating the article in question; “but I don’t think you are far wrong, Latymer.”

“I don’t, however, consider that Mr. Latymer should complain,” said Auricoma; “he has been tasting every kind I have in stock, from Tokay to Catalonia.”

“And if those bottles were full two hours ago,” added Wyversley, “he has been tasting them pretty often.”

“They were, I assure you,” replied Auricoma. “Mr. Latymer and the Marquis came to dinner with Adela and myself, and both were most disagreeable. They didn’t like the claret, St. Julien, too, and I tried them with white Burgundy, whereat that polite gentleman complained because it was not red, so I got them Chambertin, but it gave no more satisfaction. Then they grumbled at the cooking, till I was greatly tempted to send them both off. Afterwards you should have heard them abuse the dessert; it was too bad.”

“Latymer, Latymer! you ought to be ashamed of yourself!” arose from the hearers.

“Indeed, it was not I; it was Brayclift,” asseverated Latymer. “I did not say a word, save to ask Miss Erle if I might summarily eject Brayclift.”

“But you did, sir; it was too bad of you. So finally to appease them, I had up a decanter of that old blue Madeira, Reginald, and you can see how much of it is left; besides, they finished the St. Julien, and both bottles of Burgundy ‘to save its being wasted, they said,’ and there’s an empty port bottle or two on the table.”

“Well, Latymer,” ejaculated Avondale, taking up some half-a-dozen bottles one after the other, “you must be a thirsty fish. Leoville, Leoville, empty both; sherry decanter ditto, and another on the same road; this, Miss Erle, port? empty, too, by Jove, and not half-a-pint in the next. You have been giving them champagne as well. Why, this must be a quart bottle, and only the smell left; and, my gracious, they have flavoured the mixture with Deidesheim.”

Avondale looked horrified at Latymer, and the others laughed.

“You must not be too hard on him,” said

Auricoma, coming to his assistance. "He is not to be credited with every one of those bottles ; that is, not the whole, only a little of each. Mr. Cadogan likes champagne."

"Yes, I do," said Cadogan, "but, unfortunately, so do Adela and Brayclift. They favoured me with one little glass out of that small flask, and when a few seconds later I applied for another remittance, the answer was 'no effects.'"

"Hard lines that," said Avondale.

"But it is not the full account," objected Adela. "He kept the hock to himself and Stanley Carlton, and would not let Aubrey (Brayclift) or myself have any, so we seized on the champagne when it made its appearance, and drank it up ; and you should have seen how dreadfully disappointed they were to find it all gone. Was not that the fact, Mr. Latymer?"

"Oh, yes ; appeal to Latymer, of course," replied Cadogan ; "he would at your bidding tell any cram. And how could he know ? He was busily engaged the whole of the time in discovering the bottom, first of that fretted sherry decanter, and then of the Madeira one. He could not even offer Miss Erle a glass."

"Shame, Latymer, shame!" expostulated Wyversley.

"But Mr. Cadogan was quite as remiss," said Auricoma; "I had to ask him twice before he would allow me a sip of the Epernay."

"A polite company you have been favoured with this evening," said Wyversley, laughing.

"Yes. I have put a bad mark against Mr. Cadogan's name, and two against Mr. Latymer's, and shall not let him come to my box again for some time."

"Serve him right, too," added Adela Beauchamp. "He went with the Marquis and myself to the 'Savoy' last Saturday, and he was too lazy even to clap Lucy Vivian after she sang 'Fading away.'"

"But I could not say pretty things to you and applaud her at the same time," objected Latymer.

"Pooh, pooh! Don't try to gammon one with any such nonsense as that," replied Adela.

"Let us leave him, Mr. Avondale," said Auricoma. "You promised some time ago to have a game of billiards with me."

"With the greatest pleasure, though you have

such a reputation that the game will be altogether one-sided."

"One-sided your way, you mean; don't assume such a low opinion of yourself—I always suspect it."

"I will come too," said Adela Beauchamp; "that is, if you do not intend to play single."

"Oh, no, it will be better with partners," said Wyversley. "But you surely won't desert your gallant cavalier?"

"Won't I, though? He has been quite dull this evening—drinking too much wine, I suppose. I tried to get him out on the lawn just now, it is so fine, but he would stay in. So we have been muddling over those cards till I was dropping off to sleep as you entered."

"Heyday, Latymer, another charge. This is a pretty accusation to be laid against a man like you."

"'Pon my word, it is downright slander. I—"

"There, don't listen to him," interrupted Adela. "Come on, Mr. Avondale, the others will follow," and she incontinently passed her arm through his, and, with a merry twinkle in her blue eyes, led him off.

At the door they encountered young Talbot and Stansville.

“ You here, Avondale !” exclaimed the latter. “ Have you dropped from the clouds ? Why, you are supposed to be at Waterbridge, running full tilt of one of her Majesty’s Ministers. You are in bad hands, allow me to tell you. The lady on your arm is a most determined heart-breaker.”

“ Pooh, pooh, Mr. Stansville—yours, at least, I should never break. You may make yourself useful by handing me a cue.”

“ Oh, you are going to have out that game of billiards you arranged on the Derby Day, I suppose ?”

“ Yes, Stansville,” answered Wyversley. “ It is Auricoma and myself against Walter and Lady Adela—which will win ?”

“ We shall, of course,” said Adela vivaciously, before Stansville could reply. “ I can beat you any day, and I am sure such a genius as Mr. Avondale can do the same for Violet.”

The game proceeded, one hundred up, Wyversley leading, and giving the usual miss. The balls would not run well for Avondale, and, con-

sequently, the other side kept ahead, scoring forty to his eighteen, when his partner made a break of twelve. Once more they ran away, and reached ninety-two, when he and his partner were at seventy. Then Adela not only put on ten in fine style, amid the applause of the lookers on, who nearly filled the room, but left the balls badly for Wyversley. His lordship could do nothing, and Avondale, getting his hand well in, finished the game.

“Well won, Walter,” exclaimed Wyversley.

“Not a bit of it,” objected Avondale. “The credit is entirely due to Adela.”

“Yes, she played really well—we will drink her health;” and “Lady Adela Beauchamp” went round the giddy circle.

“I am no match for her,” he continued; “so you must, to settle the question, have just one game with Auricoma.”

“Decidedly not—far be it from me to cross swords with so fair a dame. I willingly yield myself vanquished.”

“No, you will not, sir. You must fight, and do your worst. If you don’t, I shall proclaim

you—what is the term, Reg?—recreant, I think, and that will be a deeper stigma than Adela fixed on Mr. Latymer just now.”

“Well, if I must, I must.”

“Remember,” she added with a pretty laugh, “it is to be a fight to the death. We neither give nor ask quarter. Reginald will be my squire—” “And I,” “And I,” “And I,” put in several voices.

“How bloodthirsty you are become,” said Wyversley; “and see what a number you have on your side. You will frighten Walter—he has no one to back him up.”

“Don’t alarm yourself,” said Adela, “I am not going to desert him. I don’t imagine he will stand in need of much assistance. He knows that ‘faint heart never won fair lady.’ Do you feel particularly nervous, Walter?” and she smiled a siren’s smile, and gave a witching shrug with her fair shoulders. “Better take a glass of wine first, perhaps, and let me chalk your cue. Now, ladies and gentlemen, the course is cleared for the grand tournament between—never mind who—play.”

It was again one hundred up. Avondale led; the luck was pretty even, and they kept fairly together, sometimes the one, sometimes the other, running on eight or ten ahead by a good break. Like most women, Auricoma was much better at pocketing than cannoning; she had also acquired the difficult knack of leaving the balls badly, and was, therefore, altogether no mean adversary. When Avondale had reached ninety-five her score was ten less. Eight she wiped off, and thus the game seemed her opponent's, but he missed at ninety-nine an easy cannon. His gallantry aroused a cheer, under cover of which Auricoma acknowledged her defeat, and craved considerate treatment at his hands.

Avondale, however, would not take credit for the victory—"another game would end differently."

"Oh, no; I would not venture again. I am satisfied. Come on out into the fresh air; the room is rather warm."

Avondale had scarcely looked round before. He was now surprised to see how many were present — fashionable young fellows, though

with one or two approaching middle age, most of whom he knew, and girls intended by nature for a better fate.

It was a beautiful night. The summer breeze was hushed to a gentle whisper, and scarcely stirred the leaves of the trees, or rippled the surface of the noble river that runs close by. The moon, near its full, shed its silvery beams like a flood of light on the fountains and the flowers, and on the expanse of water before the house. Passing lovely was the prospect, and one could have deemed it a scene from fairy-land rather than in the suburbs of the modern Babylon. Love was in the air, and all yielded to its spell, all save, perhaps, Avondale. He felt the fascination of the time and place, his spirit yielded insensibly to the enthralling allurements that surrounded him, but, potent as were the fascination and the allurements, not utterly did they steep him in forgetfulness or transform the deep-seated springs of his character. The subdued laughter that ever and anon arose, would grate harshly on his ears, and the murmuring prattle of female voices, soft and low as it was, had a discordant ring. Some similar feelings

probably possessed Auricoma, for, as they slowly paced the lawn, he noticed an unwonted quivering in her voice, and a brightness in her eyes that seemed to arise from tears.

“What a row those fellows are making in the dining-room!” ejaculated Wyversley, as a louder peal than usual came forth. “Who is it you have there?”

“I scarcely know. Brayclift is one, and I think Claude Horton is another. They are playing cards.”

“Of course, and for no light stakes. Brayclift is going to the devil fast. He has lost frightfully on the turf this year. But, hang it, Auricoma, there is that fellow Dawson here again. I saw him in the hall. I wish you would make him understand he is not wanted.”

“I should be glad if he would stay away—you know it, Reginald; but how am I to make him? He came to-night with Adela and the Marquis.”

“I dare say. He sticks to Brayclift, no doubt; so birds of prey are certain to be found where the carcase is; but if he can’t take a broad hint he should have distinct information that his

company is not wanted. I hope I don't offend you, Walter, in thus speaking my mind."

"I am sorry that you don't. I fear that Dawson's deeds and connections are not such as will, in all respects, bear inspection."

"I know they are not," said Auricoma; "but I hope neither of you will quarrel with him. He would not hesitate at anything to get revenged."

"What time do you have supper, Violet?" asked Wyversley.

"I told them twelve o'clock; is that too early?"

"Too late, I think; because that would mean half-past, and you know how long we are certain to be over it. Walter has to be off to-morrow morning to his election again."

"Then we will say half-past eleven, if you like. It is getting on for that already."

She went into the house to give the necessary orders, and, when she rejoined them, said—

"I have asked Lucy Vivan—she is just come—to sing 'Fading Away.'"

As she spoke a piano sounded in the drawing-room, and a finely modulated voice rolled forth the words of that fashionable song—

“Fading away into stillness deep,
The distant echoes die,
Like the first winds that fitfully sweep
Across an autumn sky.

“Like the first winds, that in saddest tone,
Tell that the aching heart,
Its gladsome spring and gay summer gone,
From love and hope must part.”

All remained in mute admiration till the song was over, and then with applause amply repaid the singer. She was the favourite actress at the Savoy, and this song occurred in “The Lost Lord of Craven Hall,” which had been recently brought out, and in which she represented the heroine. She was a good actress, and always got up her part well and carefully, and this, added to her graceful figure and excellent voice, rendered her one of the leading stars. The applause sank into a silence which was only broken by Latymer asking “some one to favour them with a more lively and less sentimental melody to counteract the effect of such a depressing recital.”

Adela Beauchamp volunteered.

“I will give you the song you so much like, Mr. Latymer—‘When I was young.’”

“That is too bad of you,” he objected. “I

don't care a bit for that miserable ditty ; and, besides, it is so common."

"It will do capitally, Adela," exclaimed Bray-clift, who was not on such good terms with Latymer as he was with the young lady. "Go on—we all want it."

So, without any more prelude, she started off—

"When I was young I loved each lass
That had a beaming eye ;
But perhaps I better loved a glass
Of sparkling *eau de vie*.

"My gushing heart kept changing hands,
It ne'er was really mine ;
'Twas Polly's first, and next 'twas Anne's,
And then 'twas lost in wine."

One or two more songs, and a little more tender conversation and flirtation under the lilacs and amongst the laurels, and supper was announced. Avondale was as much surprised at the appearance of the dining-room as he had been at that of the drawing-room. A chastened and cultivated taste was in each displayed, both in the selections and in the grouping of the furniture. Even Wharfedale House, the most *recherché* establishment in London, could not disdain a comparison. This woman, where

could she have learnt such discrimination? He gazed at her in pity and sorrow. He felt much disposed to curse the dispensations of that Providence which had made her what she was. He now understood the sway she exercised over his friend, the sway which a strong mind ever has over a weaker one, the sway which, powerful as it is in case of man over man, is rendered tenfold more powerful when exercised by a woman beautiful but resolute, ambitious but loving, over the soul of him that adores her. And, if he pitied Auricoma, he felt concern for Wyversley. He could no longer conceal from himself that the young nobleman loved her in the fullest and truest sense of the word, and it was very doubtful whether considerations for the opinions of society would prevent a marriage.

Auricoma took the head of the table. The seat, somewhat elevated above the rest, suited her queenly bearing admirably. Right and left of her were the two friends, and opposite, at the end of the table, the Marquis of Brayclift, supported by two damsels, on his right, Adela Beauchamp, an especial favourite of his, on the left,

Mrs. St. John Broosby. Twenty-one sat down. The females were all of them the better members of their class; indeed, save the two just mentioned, none were decidedly doubtful characters, the greater part being actresses. Lucy Vivian was at Wyversley's right hand and under the particular care of Stansville. The tables were loaded with every delicacy. Noticing Avondale's look of wonderment, Auricoma told him not to deem that this was a specimen of her usual style of living, it was only to honour the visit of a friend of her dearest friend.

The fun grew fast, youthful sallies and sharp repartee succeeded in quick succession, and enjoyment reigned supreme. Auricoma proved herself well fitted for the position of hostess, and, spite of a predisposition to the contrary and a determination to judge her by the strictest measure, Avondale could not but admit to himself that she would fill with equal *éclat* the rank of an English peeress—if it were not for the one damning and insurmountable obstacle.

The more material part of the meal was over, when Lucy Vivian passed over to him a scrap of paper:—

“Before we break up, you must propose Auricoma’s health.”

He had expected as much, but it was an office which he hesitated to accept, as he could not preach a homily; every word that he might say would go to strengthening the coils enwrapping his friend. Yet he did not like to refuse; it would be a piece of gross unpoliteness, and, besides, Auricoma had evidently, during the evening, been nervously anxious to secure his favourable opinion. He took a middle course. While the conversation was still in full swing, he scribbled on a leaf of his pocket-book a few lines in rhyme, and sent them to Claude Horton, who possessed a good voice, and confidence enough even, if he had not to sing any difficult air at first sight, with a request that he would trolly them as best he could for the general benefit. Horton shook his head, and hesitated at first, but after showing them to Adela Beauchamp, who was next him, he attempted the task, that lively young lady having kindly offered to relieve him of the undertaking if he were afraid. He got up, and promised briefly that he was not going to make a speech, though he was about to adventure on a performance

which would probably seem to some quite as unsatisfactory—a song. He begged them, however, to restrain their condemnation till they had heard the words, which would certainly be ample apology for his presumption ; and he hoped, if he broke down, they would help him through with it. A clatter of glasses and an irregular cheer followed, and then amidst a silence which could not have arisen from curiosity alone he began—

THE QUEEN OF THE FEAST.

Auricoma, the beautiful !
With hair of golden hue,
Whose lovely eyes are gleaming bright
As drops of summer dew !
See here from every quarter drawn,
Thy potent sway to own,
Youth, wealth, and rank, a brilliant band,
Are thronging round thy throne.

The silence was broken by uproarious applause, as he concluded, and he had to repeat the verses, Adela and Brayclift assisting him this time. The company would have demanded it a third time but for their anxiety to hear the next verse.

Auricoma, our more than queen,
The banquet's crowning light,
Didst thou not grace the festive board,
'Twere hung with shades of night.
One favour now, our cups stand full—
Do not the prayer disdain—
A toast, a toast ! we'll pledge it thee
Again and yet again.

At the conclusion, the hearers seemed to have suddenly become demented. The cheering, for some time, literally shook the room, and it subsided only to be renewed three successive times as the verse was sung over. Then "A toast! a toast!" was shouted on every side. But Latymer rising, obtained silence.

"Gentlemen, we are utterly forgetting all our chivalry and politeness. 'When I was young,' (hear, hear, and loud laughter)—'when I was young' it was most decidedly the custom to drink the health of the lady of the house (hear, hear; 'Well said, Latymer') before we did that of anyone else. But I am old, and things have changed, though I cannot help thinking it a gross slight to our fair hostess to ask her for a toast before we have ourselves pledged her (deafening applause). Gentlemen, fill up the ladies' glasses too; bumpers and no heel-taps. 'Auricoma, the Queen of the Feast, and long life to her.'"

Every one rose, and around the table resounded "Auricoma!" "Auricoma is the Banquet's Light!" "Auricoma the Beautiful!" "the Golden-Haired!"

Auricoma tried to repress her emotions, but

the tears could not be entirely restrained, and she replied in a voice very thick and broken, that roused unwonted feeling in the hearts of more than one unthinking youth present, and caused several of the more impressible girls to give vent to their feelings in hysterical sobs and laughter.

“Gentlemen, I cannot command myself to thank you or even to find the necessary words. Believe me, I am most deeply obliged for the way you have drunk my health. I cannot say more, but I give you the toast you wish, coupling with it the name of this gentleman, Mr Walter Avondale, who has paid me such a compliment—‘The Reward that crowns Success,’ and from my inmost heart, I trust you will each win it.”

The short speech was received with even greater applause than Latymer’s. It affected Avondale more than he cared to evince, and gave him a further insight into the speaker’s character. He looked at Wyversley, and was not surprised to observe his eyes glistening and his cheek flushed with love and feeling. The toast was honoured to the full, and, after his reply, others

quickly followed. The time flew by unheeded, and it was much past one o'clock when Avondale looked at his watch. Wyversley noticed the action, and proceeded, without hesitation, to break up the carouse, saying that, grieved as he was to disturb them, yet it was impossible that Avondale or himself could remain longer. A half lament came to the lips of the company as they left their seats, but it was dispersed by the complaint from Adela Beauchamp—

“What not a single dance before we part? Let us go out on the lawn and tread one merry measure.”

She gave her hand to Brayclift, Wyverley took Auricoma, Avondale Lucy Vivian, and the others were soon suited. The windows of the drawing-room opened to the ground, so that the music could be fully heard. Stansville, a good player, seated himself at the piano, as there were more men than women. A galop first, a set of quadrilles next to recover breath, then the maddening waltz, and as a finale, the galop “Back from Richmond.”

The evening was over. The carriages of those who had driven soon came round. Wyversley

went into the house to find his hat, leaving Avondale and Auricoma standing by his horse, which the latter was patting, as she was very fond of it. He was gone a minute or two. Auricoma said—

“I had better go and assist Wyversley; he won’t know where to search.” She hesitated, and then held out her hand—“Good night, Mr. Avondale”—wrung his nervously, even painfully, and speaking in accents that went home to his heart, “You will not, cannot think so very bad of me,” hastily ran off.

“Latymer has promised to see the fellows off, said Wyversley, as he got into the phaeton. “Minnie Roberts is going to sing them one last song. We will wait for the beginning. Hark! there it is; she has a clear utterance.”

“Oh ’tis sweet to think that where’er we rove

We are sure to find something blissful and dear,

That when we are far from the lips that we love

We have but to make love to the lips that are near.”

“There is philosophy for you, Walter; but is not Auricoma a glorious girl? You are almost in love with her yourself.”

CHAPTER IX.

AVONDALE'S train left soon after breakfast. Wyversley and Stuart Jardine saw him off, the former desiring him to write if he had any spare time, to say how his prospects looked, the latter promising to come down the next evening, if a cricket match in which he was engaged—a far more important event to him than any election—was over in time.

Arrived at Waterbridge, he immediately sought the offices of Rosse and Taylor. The former was in. He had much to tell Avondale. His committee had grown stronger, they had held several meetings, many persons had promised their votes, and, what was really more important than all, both Irving and Radford had determined to petition in case of non-success.

The evening before, a large meeting of the lower classes had been held at the Market Hall—the market committee had no business to per-

mit the use of it for such a purpose. Several demagogues spoke, all inveighing loudly against the upper classes, and especially against Avondale's supporters. One of them, a delegate from some trades-union, particularly pitched into Radford, saying that he who had been once a working man was now leagued with their oppressors, that he owed his wealth entirely to the labour of those he was tyrannising over, that such men as he were traitors to their town and country, and much more in the same style. A few cried shame, but most applauded—the mob always applaud abuse and coarseness—and he next favoured Irving very similarly, but making the distinction that Irving not having ever done a day's work, and, consequently, not deserving a penny of what he possessed, had, nevertheless, some excuse for his harshness in that he was unable to appreciate a labourer's feelings; while Radford having, on the contrary, experienced the bitterness of daily toil, clearly showed by his severity to those under him that he had not the common feelings of humanity. Starrett, in acknowledging the inevitable vote of confidence, palliated the expressions employed by this fellow

and others like him—for he was not alone—and even defended some of the assertions he had made.

“In consequence, Radford and Irving called on me this morning, and said I might proclaim it as widely as I chose that ‘they were resolved, in case any open bribery should occur, to file a petition against the election.’”

Avondale was glad to hear of their determination, but trusted that his return would render it needless.

“You will be returned, I am confident,” said Rosse, “if no corruption is practised; but that I cannot hope for. Mr. Mulgrave will doubtless, if possible, avoid it, but he is in the wrong hands. Skinner and Grabmuny are old practitioners at this work, and won’t let him be honest if he would. They are well named. In common business the former looks after the clients, the latter after the fees. In elections Skinner acts as cashier to the candidate, whose cash soon disappears at a rapid rate; Grabmuny turns paymaster to the mob, and you may be certain he does not distribute to them a penny more than is absolutely necessary to purchase their consciences.

Mulgrave has had it rather warm the last day or two. His meetings have been all somewhat boisterous; the roughs don't take kindly to him, and, for some reason or other, they have got into the habit of asking after his wife—"Does she know he is out?" "Has she given him permission to put up?" "What is his allowance for expenses?" and so on."

"Decidedly unpleasant, and the more so as he can fully appreciate the force of the enquiries."

"Rather. Some of his committee have been playing tricks with him. His stiff bearing, I suppose, amuses them. They took him round the back slums yesterday morning—you know that the laziest workmen always keep Saint Monday—under pretence, no doubt, of seizing the opportunity to catch these fellows at home. My office boy followed the procession, and his narrative of the proceedings has kept the clerks laughing all the day. Mr. Taylor happened to stumble across them in the midst of a bevy of bare-armed, unbonneted, slatternly fishwomen. It was in River Street, better known as the 'Scent-Box,' where the effluvia arising, even in coldest weather, from the garbage is horrible—

imagine what it is now. I wonder Taylor, who was going to the Quay, did not prefer to go round by the Row. He said the expression of Mulgrave's face was a perfect study—a union of disgust, contempt, and anger, set off by a ghastly smile. He had, apparently, been expressing his solicitude for the welfare of the different families, and, as Taylor passed, he capped his affability by kissing, amidst the approving exclamations of the female bystanders, a dirty little urchin, said urchin's nose and face having first been elaborately polished with the still dirtier apron of its mother."

"Poor Mulgrave! Nothing but dread of Lady Thanet could have carried him safely through such an ordeal. I hope they will take him to Mrs. Snooks and her daughters."

"Ah, you made the acquaintance of that charming household—hope you enjoyed it. By the by, Mulgrave holds forth in the British Schoolroom this evening. He is rather strong on religious matters, but as his hearers are, so I am told, to comprise the ministers of all persuasions, from Father O'Slybootes down to Tom Jackson, the Unitarian, I scarcely see how he will satisfy

every one. I should not be surprised if the reverend gentlemen first, one and all, pitched into him, and then squared accounts by a set-to amongst themselves. Well, about our own matters. I have opened an account in your name with the 'National Provincial'—they have a branch here, and it is better to avoid any such suspicion as might result from dealing with either of the local banks. You will therefore not spend one farthing personally, save, of course, in your hotel expenses. If you have any need to make a disbursement, send the individual to us with a note. One of the town newspapers, the 'Star,' is Radical; we can't have anything to do with it. The other, the 'Gazette,' is Liberal, but it has taken up Mulgrave rather warmly, and poured cold water on you. Consequently, I have advertised pretty heavily in the county paper, that is published at Stanton, and circulates largely here, and it has, of course, in return, been maintaining your cause most energetically. Public-houses we have left entirely alone; their support is not worth the money it costs. We have arranged for you to address the in-voters on Thursday, Friday, and Monday, and the outlying ones on Saturday, at

Ashton; and Tuesday, if need be, at Mayford, but, as the nomination is to be next day, very probably there will be quite enough to look after in other ways. I don't think there is much else to say. You must come with me to dinner. I expect Irving, and Captain Wright, and one or two others—they will certainly come in the course of the evening, if not to dinner—and we can talk over future proceedings.”

On the way to Mr. Rosse's they passed numerous supporters. Captain Wright was one.

“You must excuse me, Rosse. I have just promised young Radford to dine with him. He came down from town on Saturday, Mr. Avondale, to join in the fun, and he has been working very hard for you. Two or three other fellows will be there, Charlie Benton, and Mr. Irving's nephew, and so on, and we are all going in a body to Mulgrave's meeting. We shan't make any noise, not a bit; we hope to have much better fun by setting the parsons at loggerheads, and getting them to excommunicate each other, and the worthy candidate as well. It would be fine if we could see O'Slybootes laying into Jackson, or if we could arrange just one little round

between ranting Sam Fuddle and the aristocratic de Hautville. Good day—I am all hot for the sport, and shall be so disappointed if we don't meet with any. Good day, Mr. Avondale—we'll look you up before midnight, and report results."

Avondale got back to the "Royal George" about eleven, and, almost immediately after, Captain Wright and the other conspirators came rushing in. They had enjoyed themselves fully, at Mulgrave's expense; and, as soon as the introductions were over, hastened to describe the meeting. Wright was the speaker—

"You really should have been there, sir, I would not have missed the occasion for a fortune. Thomson, the big brewer, was in the chair. He is great at any kind of religious meeting, Church of England, that is—he is a stickler to the Establishment. He owns half the public-houses in the place, and, consequently, subscribes to all the societies, Missionary, Band of Hope, Pastoral Aid—"

"Never mind naming 'em, Wright. Mr. Avondale will know quite well—besides, you are lumping them rather—all, save Temperance and Bands of Hope; those, and Dissenters generally, he hates like poison."

“Well, as soon as he rose to start the talk, one of Mr. Radford’s workmen, who was in the plot, rose too, and, with a most devout air and puritanical twang, considered ‘it would not be becoming to open a meeting to discuss religious topics without first asking a blessing,’ and thereupon proposed that ‘the Rev. Mr. Samuel Jehoshaphat Fuddle be desired to offer up a short prayer.’ Now, if there is any man in the whole world Thomson dislikes, it is Fuddle. He is a—a—ranter, I forget the scientific designation of the animal, and therefore he is ever inveighing against the sins and idolatry of the Church. He is a red Republican and Socialist, while Thomson is a cut-and-dry Whig of the old style. He is a teetotaller, and, as such, cannot speak too harshly of the demon of drink; and is convinced that though an Episcopalian may get to heaven, and, perhaps, too, even a Tory, by very special arrangement, yet a brewer is condemned, beyond all hope of remission, to the hottest corner in Hades. You can judge then how aghast the chairman looked. Sammy got on his feet, and ‘perfectly agreed with the proposition; perhaps, too, the result might be the rescue of some Godless souls

—there were many present—from perdition ; and it might have a saving effect on Mr. Muggins, the young gentleman’—”

“Stop ; that’s too good,” shouted Avondale. “Mulgrave transformed into Muggins, the man of *ton* into a youthful class leader. Mulgrave won’t hear the last of it for some time. Go on, sir ; I beg your pardon.”

“ ‘Young gentleman’ made Mulgrave shift in his seat, and ‘Godless souls present’ startled the other divines. There was a general hubbub ; but at last Mulgrave himself appeased it. Fuddle, saddened at the defeat of his good intentions, ‘wiped off the dust of his feet against the assembly,’ and would have departed if some fellow had not begged him, as he was going out, not to leave them entirely to their own wicked devices.

“The Chairman brought his introductory remarks to a very sudden termination, and the hero of the evening commenced. We cheered him well, for he looked dreadfully in want of it. He got along very badly ; partly, perhaps, because he was on debatable ground ; but, after all excuse made, it was a miserable attempt at a speech.

He was dreadfully afraid of purely Bible topics, the nominal subject of his discourse, and kept on as long as he could upon general morality. It was most essential that children's characters should be properly moulded at an early age, and so on. They could not be too thoroughly impressed with the necessity of strictly observing the common maxims of morality, 'to do your duty to all,' 'to get your own living honestly,' 'not to steal or to covet your neighbour's goods.' Here some stentorian voice added, 'Nor to commit adultery with his widder,' and most indecorous shouts of laughter followed, which were reiterated when another of the *canaille* objected, 'With his wife you mean, Jim,' and Jim maintained, 'No, I don't—with his widder, like the gamekeeper run off with Tom Cook's widder afore Tom were really cooked, and Tom gettin' well again fout the gamekeeper on Rodmead moor, and drashed 'un well.' I really pitied Mulgrave. His equanimity was thoroughly upset, and his sentences grew more lagging. At last he ventured to say the Bible should be read in all schools, and then, as the priest looked terribly irate, he added—save where conscientious scruples existed against it,—

which exception caused all the other preachers to assume lowering countenances. He continued that one uniform system of doctrine should be associated with the Word of God, whereat the Church parsons smoothed their rugged brows, while their brethren frowned the more savagely—with such modifications as might be found necessary—a qualification that did not satisfy any party.

“ ‘You would, so I understand, compel the reading of the Scriptures as part of the daily instruction?’ asked the Vicar of St. Anne’s.

“ ‘Yes, decidedly.’

“ ‘You would, would you, in Catholic schools?’ put in O’Slybootes.

“ ‘Oh no, not if the priesthood made objections.’

“ ‘But you deem Scriptural teaching essential in a Christian country?’ enquired the Vicar.

“ ‘Absolutely essential, sir, if we do our duty.’

“ ‘And is it essential if Holy Church considers the lives of the saints better fitted for young minds?’

“ ‘That alters the matter. Decidedly not in such a case.’

“ Here some one shouted, ‘ Well done, governor; blow hot, blow cold with same breath.’

“ ‘ And about doctrine, you would allow Dissenters to impart their own views to the children in their schools?’ suggested the Methodist minister.

“ ‘ Yes, I could not think of interfering with any man’s peculiar principles.’

“ ‘ But you would prohibit the worship of saints, and pictures, and images?’

“ ‘ Of course. I utterly abhor everything savouring of idolatry.’

“ ‘ And you would put down Papistical practices in the Church?’ added the Vicar.

“ ‘ Undoubtedly. Puseyism is worse than Roman—no, than Unitar—no, I mean than—ah—yes—pure and undefiled religion is what we should all seek after.’

“ ‘ You, however, think crucifixes and paintings of the Virgin most important to illustrate the truth?’ enquired the priest.

“ ‘ And you would support Ritualism as admirably admitted for attracting some persons?’

“ ‘ Yes. I have no hesitation on those points. The national form of worship must be maintained

in all its simplicity and purity ; but I would not interfere with means adopted to secure the attention of the heedless or inattentive. And while I denounce every action savouring of idolatry, I believe material symbols and tangible forms may often be most happily employed to inculcate important dogmas.' ”

“ A most interesting spectacle. Why, Mulgrave was intended by nature for a tenth-rate attorney, or for some such occupation where capacity to change sides is all-important to ensure success. You must be rather dry with all this talking ; take another glass. What did you have before—claret ? This is good, better than one expects at a country inn. Mr. Benton has some hock at his elbow, and there is sherry in that bottle, but I would advise you not to touch it,” said Avondale.

“ Yes, the claret is very fair, thanks, but Brown is noted for his wine. Of course all the while a fire of small shot was going on round the room ; and the ministers, at each reply, glanced at each other in a way that portended a desperate hand-to-hand fight shortly. I can't tell you half of what was said. At last it came to a crisis.

“ ‘ You require the catechism to be explained to the children and got up by them ? ’ asked the Vicar.

“ ‘ Yes, most certainly.’

“ ‘ And portions of the missal to be a daily lesson ? ’ continued the father.

“ ‘ Yes, a very necessary part of their instruction.’

“ Here parson and priest turned their attention to each other, the former shaking his hat in the latter’s face, and the latter gripping his walking-stick as though at Donnybrook.

“ ‘ You would direct the clergy to inculcate into the young the doctrines of original sin and consubstantiation,’ demanded de Hautville.”

“ ‘ Of course, most undeniable truths.’

“ ‘ And you think that boys and girls should be taught that the Pope is as bad as the devil, and High Church scamps a great deal worse ? ’ said Samuel Fuddle.”

“ ‘ I have not a doubt of it, ’ and thereupon the curate and the ranter faced each other with manifest intention to settle their differences on the spot.

“ ‘ Dr. Watts’s psalms and hymns should

alone be sung in God's house?' asked the Methodist.'

"'Unquestionably; they are gems of poetry.'

"'And no singing or music should be permitted in places of worship?' said the Quaker.

"'Certainly not, the attention is distracted by such noises.'

"With this the disciple of Wesley and the man of peace flourished their gingham over each other's head as though to resolve *vi et armis* the points of dispute. Clatter, clatter went their tongues; but rising above the din one thankless wretch followed up the last answer with, 'And Tom Paine's catechism should be made the primer in every infant school?'

"'I think so. It is a most invaluable work.'

"Oh dear, the confusion became ten times confounded. Episcopalian and Baptist, Quaker and Romanist, all requested an explanation of this closing reply, and then again, ere explanation could be given, continued the hot debate *inter se*. At length the irate divines withdrew, though their wrangling continued till they were fully a quarter of a mile off, and it is rumoured that on the bridge one couple, de Hautville

and Fuddle, terminated their arguments by means of nature's primitive weapons, his reverence acting as second to the one and Fox's follower performing that office for the other. As soon as they had gone, the usual vote in favour of Mulgrave was made and seconded, but Benton here moved an amendment, which Radford seconded, that 'as the right honourable gentleman has shown such an intimate acquaintance with Educational subjects he be recommended to resign his present post, and obtain an appointment as Inspector of Schools.' Uproarious cheering followed this proposition, and as the chairman would not receive it, we put it ourselves to the assembly, and, at least three-fourths of the hands were held up for it. Not a word could afterwards be heard. Old Thomson shouted something to the reporters, probably the original motion. Mulgrave bowed his thanks—for what no one can imagine. The good point about him is that he holds on to his work with all the stubbornness of a genuine bulldog; but that is very little to make a Minister out of. If he is to be taken as a specimen of our acutest politicians, if he is to be ranked among

the great statesmen of the day, then it is no wonder that we are losing caste and prestige amongst foreigners, that our operations are meddle in one quarter and muddle in another, that English diplomacy has become a synonym for stupidity, mismanagement, and irresolution. That is nearly all. Mulgrave and his party having beaten a retreat we were left in possession of the field, and we then propounded a resolution in favour of you, and it was carried unanimously, though I frankly confess that if it had been in favour of the King of Dahomey, or Brown the corporation beadle, it would have been received with just the same approbation. So we came away, having first seen the place cleared and handed over to the charge of the schoolmaster in order to prevent any reports being spread as to damage done, &c.”

“ You must have had a most amusing scene. I should much like to have been present, but it would not have been safe for me to have put in an appearance.”

“ No, it would not ; Mulgrave’s friends would have sworn you cheered us on. You would have enjoyed it. Mulgrave grew perfectly distracted with the different questions put to him ; their effect increased by a running comment kept up by the

gamins, and when he made that hash about Paine I don't think he was in full possession of his senses. He won't venture again to expound his ideas on religious matters to a mixed multitude. And the ministers themselves—the charitable looks they cast at each other—there was no need for us to incite them or to work upon their prejudices. They were too well primed with intolerance, and required but the slightest spark to cause them to explode. But it is useless for me to pretend to describe the climax. You may imagine it, perhaps. Mulgrave on the platform, his examiners, some there, some in the front seats, waxing every moment hotter and more irate with him and themselves, and the mob cheering them on most vociferously. I suppose Mulgrave's committee scarcely expected such a crowded attendance. You had nothing to do with filling the room, I suppose, Radford ?”

“I? Nothing at all. How could I? I rather fancy I saw a number of the governor's workmen present; but I could not be certain, I am at home so little. That stout foreman of yours was there, I believe, Irving.”

“Was he? Not unlikely. He is fond of a

joke, almost too much so, my uncle tells him sometimes, and I should not be surprised if he brought some of his chums with him."

"Well, gentlemen," said Wright, after a little more conversation, "I don't think we need detain Mr. Avondale any longer. It is getting late, and he will have quite enough work to do before next Wednesday without losing his sleep in listening to our chatter. We will just drink his health, and success and confusion to Mulgave, Starrett, and Everett—a bumper."

"And long life to the Rev. Mr. Fuddle," suggested Avondale.

"And long life to Sammy Fuddle—now one and all, Mr. Avondale!"

"Mr. Avondale, M.P. for Waterbridge!"

"Mr. Avondale!"

"Mr. Avondale!"

Avondale thanked them very much, protested there was no need for them to go, and begged of those who were disengaged to take breakfast with him next morning. He had not yet settled about the morrow's visits, and should, therefore, be glad for some one to accompany him. Benton, Radford, and one or two others accepted the invita-

tion ; Irving and Wright could not ; and they then went off, highly pleased with the evening's amusement, and waking the silence of the night with the ballad—

The Tory, he came to Waterbridge town,
To get him a seat, to get him a seat ;
But the voters they'd have the money paid down,
For they thought him a cheat, they thought him a cheat.

'Twas a £20 note to the councilmen first ;
The whole of 'em took it, the whole of 'em took it.
In dealings like these they never went trust,
Though he wanted to book it, he wanted to book it.

The grocer got five, and the draper asked ten,
As he was a swell, as he was a swell.
The baker and butcher, like sensible men,
Kept their little game well, their little game well.

The freemen were dear at 10s. a soul,
The watermen too, the watermen too.
For the scamps got dead drunk the day of the poll,
And not one voted blue, not one voted blue.

The lawyers, oh dear, they swindled him quite,
As they only can, as they only can.
He got off at last, robbed, plundered outright,
But a far wiser man, a far wiser man.

AVONDALE

OF

AVONDALE.

A POLITICAL ROMANCE.

IN THREE VOLS.

BY

UTTERE BARRE.

I have a lever, had I fulcrum too,
The earth from dullest sloth should be uplift.

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BOOK II

(CONTINUED)



WATERBRIDGE ELECTION.

WATERBRIDGE ELECTION.

CHAPTER X.

UNNECESSARY to detail minutely the history of the next few days. There was a wonderful sameness about the proceedings. Humbug is the grand instrument of success on such occasions, assisted where necessary, by evasion or prevarication, or even, it may be, downright falsehood. The supple tongue and the easy conscience are all-important. Promises and oaths must be ready *ad libitum*, promises forgotten as soon as made, oaths sworn to with a mental reservation. Every voter has some peculiar weakness which must be probed, some peculiar views which must receive delicate attention. Happy is the man whose sharp wits enable him to discover the former, thrice happy he who can adapt himself to the latter.

Mankind has not yet reached such a pitch of

development that it can hear with any equanimity its hobbies attacked, its foibles ridiculed. Who wishes to gain its good-will must pander to it, but so pandering he may shape and mould it to his ends. Few, very few men who cannot be led by the nose. Each thinks himself a heaven-born genius or a Jove-inspired teacher, and will far more readily forgive the smooth-faced knave, who, cringing to his prejudices, has inveigled him into some ruinous speculation, than the friend who, relying on long years of acquaintanceship, has pointed out to him the risks incident to that speculation, and in so doing has been compelled to cast reflections on his judgment and discretion.

Flattery of flattery, all is flattery. Those who pride themselves on being superior to the failings of the race are yet steeped in self-conceit. Tell the philosopher that the human intellect is limited, and he may believe you; tell him that he personally is not omniscient, and you make him your enemy for life!

I have already said that Avondale won laurels at canvassing. He was a good listener, always a most useful point. Indeed, as all men like the sound of their own voices, and not a few are

afflicted with a *cacoethes garriendi*, it is difficult to over estimate the utility of such a qualification, not merely at elections, but ever and always in dealings with the world.

“Silence is golden,” said the sage, but he confined the maxim to mere abstention from untimely and ill-judged speech; add thereto the attention to your neighbour’s converse that seems charmed with its profundity of wisdom, and you get a couple that is irresistible.

But he was a good talker if opportunity was offered, and can opportunity be wanting when the circle is illumined by the presence of the softer sex? True enough the motion of their own tongues delights women, true enough the abstracted gaze and the thoughtful brow win their consideration, but these must be marks of unquestioned intellect. The female mind is quick at detecting counterfeits, and bitter is its contempt for the pensiveness that means inanity, and the diffidence that means inability. Avondale was well up in the common topics of debate, and the different public questions afloat; he soon made himself familiar with all the whims and peculiarities of Waterbridge, and with their stock

subjects of complaint or satisfaction. He worked incessantly, and was heartily complimented by both his solicitors and his committee. He gauged roughly the extent and intensity of the corruption with which the town was infected, and spite of the scorn which he had often expressed for the morals of the shop-keeping class, and for which Lady Wharfedale had already lectured him, he was totally surprised at the utter disregard displayed more than once by men of good standing for the most elementary principles of honour. He had called on Mr. Broadcloth, a draper and justice of the peace for the borough. The good gentleman was completely satisfied with his views.

“But I have a trifling bill left unsettled from the last election.”

“I am sorry to hear it,” said Avondale, who was alone. “It is not right to have debts unpaid.”

“Of course not, sir; I am glad you think so. You see,” handing him a slip of paper, “it is but a trifle over £40; I should be perfectly satisfied with the even money.”

“Ah, so I suppose. Have you sent it in to Mr. What’s-his-name?”

“Yes, it was after his accounts were settled. But you take his place this time, sir, I suppose?”

“No, not exactly.”

“Some of his supporters are on your committee—Johnson and Mitchell—and their bills were not paid, I know. You would find my support of service.”

“I understand,” said Avondale, a light breaking upon him. “I will send this memorandum to Messrs. Rosse and Taylor; I have left all pecuniary matters in their hands, who will be able to judge whether the £40 would be well laid out.”

“Oh, no, sir, not for the world! it would utterly ruin me,” exclaimed Broadcloth in tones of unfeigned terror.

“But, my dear sir, there really cannot be any objection. It seems to be the ordinary way of business.”

“No, no, I beg you to return it. I would not for anything allow your solicitors to hear of such a proposition. I—I—”

Here Taylor himself came in.

“I heard you were here, Mr. Avondale; secured our friend, I hope?”

“Yes, I think so, at least conditionally.”

“Glad of it; extremely obliged, Mr. Broadcloth. May we put your name on the committee? I believe you were treated rather shabbily two years ago. We shall have nothing of this kind. Mr. Avondale has restricted our expenses, and everything is to be paid for at once.”

Mr. Broadcloth smiled a ghastly smile, and appeared to have lost power of speech; and his discomfort was not diminished by Avondale’s promise as he withdrew—

“I will most certainly let you know a reply in the course of the evening.”

Avondale removed Taylor’s enquiring look by passing him, when they got into the street, the bill.

“This is our honest friend’s condition. He fixes his price rather high, even for Waterbridge.”

The solicitor was delighted with the document.

“We will have it framed and put into Mr. Rosse’s private room. And that man is an elder or a deacon, or whatever ’tis they call it, and what is ten times worse, is duly empowered

by her Majesty to try offences against the laws."

His interview with Fleshman, one of the chief butchers, extended his experience.

"You want my vote, sir? Well, sir, I have not promised any one yet. I have been too busy lately to think about it, sending pigs up to London, killed, for a provision merchant, and have cleared something like £3 a head, besides paying the breeders good prices. Fair trade you will think that, sir. Perhaps you could do something in the mutton line, sir? I have a pretty little flock of twenty just out of the town; could let you have them at £3 10s. a head. Not know what to do with them if you bought them? Why, sir, I could sell them again for you at £3 a piece. Don't like the bargain? Perhaps you will think it over, sir. Good day, sir."

Figgs, the grocer, was also a sharp man of business, spite of his liking for 'taters and bacon. He asked Avondale to try his port.

"Mr. What's-his-name, when he called on me at last election, liked that wine amazingly. He took one glass, smacked his lips, said 'twas capital—worth a guinea a glass. Then took

another, and said that was even better ; asked me if I liked it, whether I drank much of it ? I told him no ; two glasses at a guinea each were quite enough for me at once. Ah, he was very pleasant spoken ; and next morning I found he had somehow dropped two sovereigns into one of the glasses. He liked children too. He gave my two little girls a halfpenny apiece, and in the evening my wife found they were playing with sovereigns. Yes, sir, sovereigns ; a positive fact. Rather strange where they picked 'em up ; people don't often drop money about like that. I don't ; I can always keep quiet any that I get. I voted for Mr. What's-his-name, but I am sorry he did not get in. I gave my other vote to Mr. Mulgrave. He is a nice man, though rather stuck up. My wife saw him ; I was not here when he came. He particularly liked some grapes that were on the table—same as those, Mr. Avondale ; that is, they would answer the same purpose ; those are fresh, the others were preserved. My wife told him we had only one box of 'em left, and he said he would give anything for them, they could not get such good ones in town, and so she sold them for £10. You would take a

box? Very glad, sir, but I really believe it is the last. You don't mind? Of course not, sir. Send the bill to Rosse and Taylor? Rather not, sir; prefer to do business with the gentleman himself, sir. Usually have ready money at these times. Rosse and Taylor will pay at once? Afraid of lawyers; yes, sir, afraid of 'em; they're pickpockets. Will you take the grapes, sir? A cheque will do. Your solicitors to settle the bills? Then I'd rather not, rather not, sir; excuse me. Good day, sir."

These two may be taken as fair specimens of the run of interviews in such cases when Avondale was by himself. If any of his committee accompanied him the conversation was generally confined to the matter in hand. Of course it must not be supposed that, widespread as was the itching for bribes, it had contaminated the majority of the voters. Avondale's immediate supporters were true men and honourable, who deplored the dishonour thus inflicted on the town, and had taken up his cause simply and solely in order to put a check to the evil. He refraining from illegal practices, his opponents might be

persuaded to the same. If not, and he should nevertheless be returned, then most certainly a change for the better would be brought about. If, however, notwithstanding all their efforts, corruption and dishonesty should again meet with success, Irving, Radford, and others were determined to petition for an enquiry; better the privilege be taken away from all than be turned to the immoral gain of the most degraded section.

The days passed quickly, canvassing in the morning, public meetings in the evening, the committee sitting at all hours. Avondale's strength and energy were sorely tried, but he had his adherents' warmest sympathies, and he was cheered on by kind friends. Daily his father and sister wrote him; almost as frequent were epistles from the Marquis of Wharfedale and from Wyversley; Stuart Jardine had, of course, rejoined him, and was in constant communication with Mr. Jardine; Mr. FitzHenry sent him more than one letter; and what nerved him, or at least he thought so, more than all else, were two brief notes from Miss Dawson.

CHAPTER XI.

MONDAY, Tuesday, Wednesday came. The farce of nomination was gone through, almost in dumb show. Starrett was the favourite, but scarcely obtained even a hearing. Avondale and Everett met with a very similar reception—for two or three minutes the yelling of the mob subsided into a moderately loud roar, and then it rose again and utterly drowned their voices. Mulgrave was proposed first in order, but was decidedly in disfavour with the populace, who amused themselves in pelting him with new potatoes and early apples.

The show of hands was in favour of Starrett, and the polling was appointed for the next day. All the committees were in full work that evening, completing their organisation, and arranging the sub-committees who were to supervise the different districts. The morning opened dry, but cloudy. Avondale, till noon, headed the lists,

which were thus exhibited :—Avondale, 460 ; Mulgrave, 380 ; Starrett, 360 ; Everett, 350.

At two o'clock he still kept ahead, but reports were brought in from all quarters to his committee that the lowest class of voters were hanging back, the freeholders who had, by remaining till the last moment, so often sold their votes high, and turned the election that was already won.

“It will be their last opportunity for trading in the franchise,” said Irving.

Before dismissing his men to their dinner, Radford had called them together into his big yard, and cautioned them against taking bribes. He told them to use their own discretion in the matter, but begged them to show themselves honest and upright, adding that, in all probability, there would be an enquiry into the state of the town, and that, in such an event, they would not much relish being exposed before their neighbours. The numbers, as now declared, were—Avondale, 570 ; Starrett, 540 ; Mulgrave, 500 ; Everett, 490.

Another hour elapsed ; canvassers were rushing about eagerly seeking for those who had not yet

voted, and employing every inducement to get them up to the hustings; and an excited multitude filled the streets. Starrett was at length first. Starrett, 660; Avondale, 650; Everett, 610; Mulgrave, 600.

The chance of the Secretary for Ireland looked very shaky.

“I hardly know whether to congratulate you or not,” said Mr. Irving to Avondale. “You appear to be elected, for I dare say the figures, though not quite exact, are not far out relatively. But the Tories will probably petition, and Everett was much inclined to do so two years ago, and I believe that he has kept himself pretty free from bribery this time. If he does petition the election must be annulled. The corruption already has been frightful. I have just come from the Water-side Ward, and the sub-committee say that they have at least thirty voters left, every one of whom must be paid. Not one in half-a-dozen will vote during the next hour without a bribe.”

Half-past three o'clock came. Every one had turned out to watch the proceedings, the shops were all shut, and the mob seemed rather a gathering of French Republicans than a concourse of stolid

Anglo-Saxons. Mulgrave and Everett had once more changed their places in the order of names, thus—Starrett, 720 ; Avondale, 665 ; Mulgrave, 635 ; Everett, 630.

A quarter to four and the fight might fairly be considered over. The noise and shouting had, in some degree, quieted—probably the most persistent of the rioters had dispersed to the different public-houses to talk over the contest, and to get themselves drunk at the candidates' expense while the opportunity was still left them. Avondale's supporters, it was evident, had nearly all come to the fore—Starrett, 735 ; Avondale, 668 ; Mulgrave, 660 ; Everett, 645.

The minutes were running rapidly out, and Avondale's friends were preparing to escort him in triumph back to the hotel, when, amidst a stunning clamour of yells, cheers, groans, and laughter Sandie MacSwindle, the briber general of the town, marched up to the hustings, followed by a drove of "freemen," scraped together from the slums and alleys, all of them half drunk, and most bearing on their countenance the marks that incontestably betoken the thief, the scoundrel, and the pickpocket.

Mulgrave saw them as they shuffled through the crowd. More than disgusted with the actions of his adherents and attorneys, in whose unscrupulous hands he had been but a tool to be employed in the dirtiest work, he recoiled from such a means of wresting the victory from his opponents. Dared he owe to aid such as that, his seat in the Chamber where Hampden and Elliott, Burke and Canning, had sat and spoken? Every feeling of honour and chivalry was called at once into activity.

He hurried to the poll clerks—"Those votes are not to be taken! I repudiate them! I give up!"

Too late. Amidst the hubbub his words could not be understood. Sandie stood calmly by, checking off his blackguard crew as each gave a plumper that helped to return to England's Parliament a Cabinet Minister as the representative of a borough stricken with a worse malady than plague or cholera, and foul with moral corruption.

His intention unheeded, Mulgrave rushed to where Avondale was standing, surrounded by friends, indignant, disgusted, ashamed.

"Mr. Avondale, I withdraw from the contest.

I dare not employ such aid as that ! Mr. Mayor—Mr. Rosse, you are a man of honour—bear me witness that I do not consent to the means by which these villians have been brought to the poll ! My committee have undone me !”

This final *coup* was completely successful. Next morning the official return gave as the close of the poll—Starrett, 739 ; Mulgrave, 678 ; Avondale, 667 ; Everett, 648.

CHAPTER XII.

AVONDALE received the warmest sympathy from every quarter. The Jardines, the Marquis of Wharfedale, Mr. FitzHenry congratulated him on the fight he had fought, expressed their unmitigated disgust at the way the victory, even in the very moment of triumph, had been snatched from him. The young men with whom he was acquainted, Wyversley, Stanley, Carlton, Brayclift, Stansville, and others, spread his reputation amongst their own friends, and he became the hero of the hour. Defeat, in fact, as not unseldom happens, did him far greater service than could have resulted from the most decided success. He was not in the least cast down by the events ; though, as a rule, he was apt to take rather a gloomy view of accidents. But his father had written to him, saying that himself, at least, was perfectly satisfied with the issue, and that, from all accounts, the representation of Water-

bridge was a very doubtful honour, and trusting that Walter would, on the first favourable opportunity, renew the attempt. His sister consoled him, and Miss Dawson found many a kind word for the man "whom all delighted to honour."

The papers had long bickerings over his cause. There were so many noticeable points about it, that, in the wordy war that ensued, all the other elections were forgotten, even though most of the seats vacated were contested but in each case unsuccessfully, by persons hostile to the new Ministry. A petition had, of course, been presented. The most deeply implicated of Mulgrave's supporters made desperate efforts to compromise, but in vain. Irving and others had long been utterly ashamed of the character of the town. Besides, the Radicals, especially of the lowest classes, not content with simply selling themselves, generally to both sides, and pocketing the money, had at each election not failed to declaim against the tyranny of the rich, and especially the rich of Waterbridge, and their rapacity and dishonesty. On the present occasion they had been attacked with redoubled virulence. Avondale was young, a stranger, a barrister, a

man who would not advance "the trade" of the town—all these were incidents by which to point their arrows of invective. It cannot, therefore, be said that any of his chief supporters were grieved at the fruit of their exertions, while some of them were really delighted.

Mulgrave himself supported the petition. He was anxious to clear his own character, and to prove that, personally, he was above the suspicion of bribery. His party in the Commons, under the circumstances influenced by him, as well as from a desire to stand well with the general public, agreed that an investigation was necessary. Consequently a commission was at once appointed to examine into the election, and to report to the House.

A few days after the election Avondale was dining at Wharfedale House. The ladies had retired, and the gentlemen left with their wine included only FitzHenry, Wyversley, and one or two intimate friends of the host.

"I wonder how Mulgrave relishes his position," said FitzHenry. "Would you care to change places with him?" he asked of the Marquis.

"No, not altogether. It is no joking matter for him. His action towards the end of the poll was most fortunate; it was the only circumstance that can save him."

"Yes, it is rather fortunate that the Bribery Bill has been thrown out and the petition has to be heard by a committee. The Commons, spite of all their honesty, and so forth, may not unlikely hush the matter up. By the by, Avondale, did you not say Mulgrave has since offered to resign?"

"Yes."

"Then there cannot be much doubt what he thinks of it. I almost pity him."

"So do I," said the Marquis. "It will be such a blow to a man in his position, if, by any chance, personal bribery could be proved against him."

"I don't think," said Avondale, "he was directly concerned in corrupt practices. His attorneys, Skinner and Grabmuny, have a reputation in their peculiar way that extends over half the country. They are, in most matters, honest enough, though somewhat sharp, but at election time they seem to go through a metamorphosis."

“Just so,” said FitzHenry. “And it is frequently the case. A man who would not for the world pick your pocket, or even purloin your umbrella, sees no harm in accepting a £5 note, and voting accordingly.”

“’Tis but a variation of the principle that rules all human transactions,” continued Avondale. “Nothing is obtained without bribery of one kind or another, the mode in which it appears done is different. It is called persuasion when it appeals to the feelings, finesse when it works upon the passions, or the weaknesses, of a man. The barrister bribes the jury, a man the woman he loves, a statesman the member whose support he wants. It is the same fact, call it by whatever name you will, though it doubtless appears in certain circumstances in much grosser and more material phases than in others.”

“Our young friend,” said the Marquis, with a slight smile, “must try to get rid of some of his peculiar philosophy. His doctrine broadly looked upon may be correct; but he forgets that without what he has been pleased to call bribery society could scarcely exist.”

“Excuse my interrupting your lordship; but,

surely, you do not maintain that human nature is so constituted that it cannot endure the full flare of naked truth."

"Perhaps not. I don't, however, speculate much on human nature. What is the soul's actual constitution is a mystery insoluble, I am convinced, by man's weaker powers. What degree of excellence it can attain to, of, and by itself, and how near God may permit it to approach in the course of ages the completeness and perfection of His own divinity, are problems which we had best leave out of our consideration. Excuse my speaking seriously, FitzHenry ; I fear you think I am preaching."

"No, my lord—God forbid. It often does one good to attempt to lift the veil that hangs across the future, and to try to form some idea of the manifold change that will have come over our race centuries hence. Demons, or deities, which shall we be?"

"You are a dreamy philosopher!" exclaimed Ravenshurst, who was one of the guests. "The man whose shrewdness and practical common sense have made for him a European reputation."

“Allow me to bow my acknowledgments,” said the lawyer, rising.

“Save from your own lips I would not have believed such an assertion. You are about the last man who, I should have supposed, has, even in the heyday of youth—

“Looked into the future far as human eye could see,
Seen the vision of the world, and the wonder that will be.”

“Few of us, Ravenshurst,” said the Marquis, “know each other. The springs of character lie deep, and ’tis but seldom another but oneself can probe them to the bottom. But I must finish my homily to Avondale, and remind him that truth is relative—what may appear indisputable to one is not unseldom viewed in a very different aspect by others. Naked truth, too, when it is opposed to preconceived notions, often revolts us by its very distinctness and crudeness. Besides all this, not a few of us are thorough humbugs, or, it may be, arrant knaves, and our predilections must, therefore, be very carefully touched.”

“Your lordship is right, I don’t deny,” said Avondale; “but, nevertheless, now and again, I cannot help picturing a period in the world’s his-

tory when the petty lie and the mean quibble will strike as harshly on the ear as unadorned veracity does now."

"And, my dear fellow," said FitzHenry, "you will content yourself with contemplating such a blissful time. Meanwhile I have no doubt you will not hesitate to employ carnal weapons such as what you have been pleased to denominate bribery, and so on, in turning to your own advancement the wickedness and dissimulation of your fellows; and, I am sure, we all wish you success in so doing, and trust that when you have reached the top of the ladder you will trim your lamp with purest oil, and keep it burning bright and clear as a guiding beacon to those at the bottom who are just beginning the ascent."

"Well said, sir," laughed the Marquis. "It is almost as good as if you were working on Justice Whitehead's simplicity, or were doing your best to ruffle the proverbial good temper of Jameson Edwardes."

"Poor Edwardes," said Avondale, "his temper is really vile, worse even than Maitland's. And his conceit is something wonderful. The report is that he thinks there are two divinities.

in the universe, one in Heaven, the other still on earth, in the guise of an Inner Templar."

"Is he so bad as that?" asked the Marquis. "I was much surprised at his going to India—he has had a great reputation."

"An overpraised man," said FitzHenry. "Besides £8,000 and a seat at the Council Board is a temptation which would induce many a barrister ambitious of distinction to give up even a good practice. By the by, is not Mr. Johnson to preside in the Waterbridge case?"

"So I heard to-day; but you would know more about it than I. It will be much more important to decide who shall form the subsequent commission to give the place a thorough investigation. There ought to be an unsparing enquiry—could you not recommend some one to the Chancellor as just fitted for such an office? A good cross-examiner would, probably, extract revelations that would be amusing to the world at large, and particularly interesting to those immediately concerned."

"Oh yes," said FitzHenry, with a smile. "On that point we may rest easy. I know the Chancellor well. He will certainly take my

recommendation for one man, and I won't ask him for more. You have not forgotten Growler?"

"What, the fellow who was always kicking up such a disturbance in the House till Magnus Jupiter packed him off to the Cannibal Islands, or No-man's-land, or some such place. Grim Growler we used to call him. What about him?"

"He came back last year—quarrelled with the Governor of the Colony, I believe—and is now in practice again."

"He will suit admirably."

"I imagine so. Indeed, if he cannot extract the truth from rogues, and frighten it out of cowards, I do not know who can."

"Poor Mulgrave—he, at least, will get no mercy. He and Growler once contested the same seat in Ireland; Mulgrave won it; and Growler never forgave him. Why is he called Grim? Is it his real name?"

"Not exactly. His proper and full designation, I believe, is George Rimme Growler; and from the initial G and the second name the sobriquet 'Grim' is easily derived. It suits him capitally. His great height, gaunt frame, large mouth, and threatening countenance, alarm an

honest witness—on a lying one they must have an overpowering effect.”

“I hope you will be able to secure his services. Poor Mulgrave! he will have a nice treat in store. Well, gentlemen, I suppose we may as well join the ladies.”

“Walter,” said Wyversley, as they were ascending the grand staircase, “you must take the first opportunity of making your peace with Lady Wharfedale. She was blowing me up tremendously at lunch this morning because you were not at her reception last Friday.”

“Dear me, what shall I do? I had better run away, perhaps.”

“Oh, no,” replied his friend, laughing, “you need not be quite so much alarmed, I will act as buffer for you if necessary.”

They made their way to the Marchioness.

“So you have condescended to favour me at last, Mr. Avondale. I appreciate the honour thus conferred. Really I—”

“My dear Lady Wharfedale,” interrupted Wyversley, “pray don’t be quite so hard on the poor fellow. I told him just now what a lecture you had in store for him, and it quite unnerved

him, I could scarcely prevent feigning illness or something of the kind to escape the vials of your wrath. Don't you see how he is trembling; you must have some mercy."

"That is all very good; every man ought to tremble in a lady's presence. What have you to say for yourself; sir?"

"*Mea culpa—peccavi*, I humbly confess it. But I have not been back in town many days."

"Many days, sir! a whole week Reginald says."

"And I have called on the Marquis twice."

"But the Marquis is not myself, sir, and you had an invitation to my reception on Friday."

"Oh, dear, Wyversley, what am I to say? Cannot you put in a word?"

"I am too much afraid for myself, Walter. We must each stand upon his own merits. But perhaps Lady Wharfedale might like to hear your account of Mulgrave's religious meeting."

"Not at all. I don't feel in the least interested in it. He may tell it me if he likes, but I shall not dream of restoring his name to my good book, from which I have erased it, unless he makes amplest submission, and even then I am

not certain. And I shan't introduce him to any one here this evening. I had so many last Friday I wished him to know; it was too bad, sir. You may sit down, though you don't deserve even that favour—by Lady Campion, if she will allow you; you need not speak to her, as you don't know her; and hold the album for her, you men never can tell what to do with your hands unless you have something in them."

So Avondale seated himself, and spite of the fair speaker's angry tone he knew from the smile that accompanied it it would be no difficult task to earn forgiveness. And he was correct in his surmise. His description of Mulgrave amongst the divines caused the Marchioness' eyes to gleam with vindictive pleasure.

"It must have been amusing. But that horrid woman, his wife, if her vanity and pride could get a similar check."

Then his account of the canvass, the portraits of Broadcloth, the draper and magistrate, and Figgs, the grocer and alderman, sketched by a few skilful touches, and the scene on the polling day secured for him a pardon.

"Well, sir, I will this once pass over the slight

you have put upon me, solely, however, out of consideration for Reginald's friendship to you, not from any merits of your own, don't imagine that. And I will, therefore, as a very particular favour, introduce you to my old friend Lady Campion, as also to this young gentleman Henri, Earl of Egremont, and to his sister, Lady Dacre de Romille."

These, a boy of eight and a girl of six, were the two eldest children of the Marquis and Marchioness.

CHAPTER XIII.

LADY CAMPION was the only sister of Lord Ravenshurst, and the wife of Sir Hugh De Mierre Campion, a baronet whose title had come down to him from the reign of the first Stuart, whose family could be traced back till lost in mist of the middle ages. His name had been honourably distinguished in our history ; but he was the last of it, the last in every way, not alone in blood, but in chivalrous feelings, in manly aspirations, in noble desires. There was not one redeeming feature about him. He was fox-hunter because of the cruel side to the sport, and would have kept gamecocks, but for the interference of law. He was a betting man, and frequented Tattersall's and Newmarket because the associates he there met were of the type most suited to his own character. He gambled, drank, swore. He did not ill-treat his wife ; he felt towards her the respect a brute has for his mate,

nothing more ; and therefore he was never better content than when she left him free to pursue his own mode of life, without interference or complaint.

Lady Campion was about three years younger than himself, and the same period older than the Marchioness, with whom she had been intimate from childhood. She had a fine stately bearing, and her face, worn by long years of neglect, and that most harrowing of all tortures, the death that a woman lives who is bound for ever to a mass of insensate humanity, still showed traces of the beauty that had once been hers. Like her brother, she possessed taste, talent, feeling, that had made her in early life one of the queens of society. But she went little abroad now, and her name was almost unknown to the newer generation. It may be asked how could she have united herself to such an unmitigated dolt as Campion ?

Her story was only a variation of the story that might be told by so many beautiful and intellectual girls who have “married well” and sold themselves to a lifelong misery for the wealth of the greybeard whose shaking fingers

can scarce fit the wedding ring in its place, or for the title of the drivelling fop who coarse, vulgar, half crazed, values the wife he has bought just as he does the new picture in his drawing-room, or the blood-mare in his stables, and for exactly the same purpose, as a showy piece of furniture for him to gape at, or as a fine specimen of Nature's workmanship admirably adapted for its special purpose. Her father was an offshoot of the Ravenshurst family. Between him and the title stood not only the two sons of the then holder, his first cousin, but also his own elder brother, who had not married till late in life. Of the two sons the one was drowned at Brighton, the other, an under-graduate at Oxford, died of a fever resulting from a cold caught at a cricket match; and their father, worn down with grief, did not survive many weeks. The same week that saw the father buried brought news from Sebastapol of the death of the brother in the attack on the Redan, and as he left only daughters, Lady Campion's father became 14th Baron Ravenshurst.

She had been married a year previously. She felt little love for her husband; she had agreed

to the union in obedience to the wishes of her friends, and partly, perhaps, because she had been educated, like most of her companions, to look forward to such an occurrence as the grand goal of her career ; but if she felt no esteem she certainly had no dislike for her husband. For Champion, then just come of age, and into the possession of a rent-roll of £30,000 a year endowed with a shapely figure, and a not unhandsome face, and noted for his skill in riding and boating, was one of the pets of society. Had Clare Ringarde refused him many a fair lady would have been anxious to console him under the rejection. So they were married, and now half her husband's property is gone to gamblers and blacklegs, his good nature and manliness have degenerated in downright rusticity and vulgarity, and her own bright youth is rapidly passing away and bearing but blasted flowers which have never come to maturity. She had been listening half dreamily to Lady Wharfedale's badinage and to Avondale's chatter, but had gradually grown more interested as the latter proceeded with his recital, and she called up a faint smile in return to his bow. The conversation grew more lively

as more general topics were brought in, and between politics and social fiascos, topics were plentiful then.

“Have you heard Mr. Avondale,” asked the Marchioness, “who are the new baronets?”

“No, I only know Maitland is going to create a whole batch ‘to reward his adherents,’ though some malignant revilers say he charges £1,000 a head. Perhaps you have some certain idea of them.”

“No, and if I had I should not tell you. Mr. Maitland to charge for the titles he bestows! You ought to be soundly punished for making up such a story. I don’t believe that you heard it.”

“Perfectly true though,” said FitzHenry, who had just joined them.

“I am afraid,” exclaimed Lady Campion, “we must put Mr. FitzHenry in the same category with Mr. Avondale, and indeed, he is the greater culprit.”

“I hope you won’t say so, as I am commissioned to ask you for a song, as also to present to you both the humble apologies of Ravenshurst and the Marquis for having been so remiss

in our attentions. We have been sitting in the balcony enjoying the coolness of the evening, and listening to the faint hum of the town, till we have grown quite sentimental."

Lady Campion accepted his arm to the piano, while the Marchioness took Wyversley's and walked to the window. It was, indeed, an evening whose loveliness might be felt by any one wearied with business toils and anxiety. Said Bransdon—

"One great advantage of temperate latitudes is the long summer twilight. This is altogether wanting in the tropics. The sun goes down fiery-red, and a short half-hour and night is on us."

"One must go to the Mediterranean," observed Ravenshurst, "to realise the perfection of twilight."

"Yes," said Bransdon, "but the old Greek poets contain few allusions to gloaming. They speak often enough about Aurora and Eous, and have woven half their legends about the rosy-fingered morn, but ne'er a one about her twin sister of the eve. Perhaps they appreciated early rising more than we."

“Hush, listen to Lady Campion,” interrupted Mrs. Bransdon ; “she has a good voice, and I like this song very much, though there may not be much genuine poetry in it—

“The moon rides high in a starry sky,
The heaven from clouds is clear ;
Her pale beams fall on tower and wall,
And on the fairy’s mere.

“Past wald and schloss, o’er the river’s breast,
The light breeze bears us on ;
The sails hang free, on our oars let’s rest,
And raise an evening song.”

Lady Campion had had years before an excellent voice. She seldom employed it now, but it still retained not a little of its mellowness and richness ; and her hearers amply applauded her effort.

“Truly enough,” said the Marquis, “there is not much poetry in the song—perhaps because it has been translated too literally—but there is none in any of the fashionable airs ; it seems to be considered totally unnecessary, an incumbrance, I suppose, to singer and listener alike. But I am not surprised at the writer drawing his inspiration from the Rhine—to float on it listlessly while the moon is shining bright on the cliffs that forms its banks, and on some old

feudal castle, perched on a neighbouring height, is to be transported to fairyland. You see the familiar legends become realities, and their nymphs and gnomes and sirens rise up before you."

"You are perfectly romantic, my lord," laughed Mrs. Bransdon.

"Other people besides the Marquis get romantic when on the Rhine," said her husband. "I remember a night in August last, when two people were in a boat between Schonberg and St. Goar, dreamily gazing at the full moon, peopling the air and the woods with fairies, and what not, and saying—"

"Never mind what they were saying," objected Mrs. Bransdon, somewhat hastily.

There was a laugh, and Ravenshurst observed—

"Though youth is the time for romance, pure and simple, yet it must be a great misfortune for a man ever to become entirely superior to the fascination of times and places."

"Still," said Avondale, "it is the tendency of modern discoveries and innovations, to free us altogether from spells and fascination. The

element of wonder is rapidly disappearing from our emotions, we should not express much astonishment if some grand inventor were to take out a patent for a grand steam propellor, worked by the internal heat, and fixed to one of the poles to enable us to go on a journey through space."

"Avondale," expostulated the host, "you are quite a nuisance; you won't permit us young people to give way an instant to childhood's whims and fancies without reminding us that we must be practical, practical. We shall vote you a bore, if you don't take care. But I fear, gentlemen, we must cut short our reveries. The dew is falling fast, and we must not allow the ladies to run the risk of catching cold."

As they rose to withdraw from the balcony into the room, Avondale was surprised to notice that Lady Champion's face was streaming with tears. She lingered a moment behind the others, and when a servant had closed the shutters and lit the lamps, she showed no trace of recent emotion.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE Session was now rapidly drawing to a close. July was well advanced, and the "slaughter of the Innocents" had commenced. The debates had sunk down from hot exchanges of wit and brilliant displays of oratory into mere routine deliberations, where tenth-rate spouters, who, earlier in the year, had been cruelly debarred from exhibiting their talents, took every opportunity of holding forth to the deserted benches, and the unfortunate subordinate Government officials that were compelled to make up the audience, in frothy rhetoric not far removed from vestry twaddling. The leaders had withdrawn from the field, and were putting away their accoutrements for half-a-year. The reorganised Ministry had shaken itself well together, and had, to all appearance, amalgamated much better than either friend or foe had anticipated.

The new arrangements for the Exchequer had

caused the "Times" to make some objection on the ground of expense, while the "Constitutional," like an elderly spinster, whose pretty niece has half-a-dozen suitors, while she is out in the cold, was never tired of proclaiming against the heinousness of the crime Mr. Maitland had committed in thus adding to the expenditure. "It was, however, only one more specimen of Liberal morality. It was but a repetition of what had so often happened before. Out of office they were ready, and anxious, and determined to do the country justice, to see that the revenues were collected as cheaply as possible, and laid on in those modes which would best conduce to the country's prosperity and welfare. No words could they employ strong enough to express their horror of waste, and their just indignation at the misappropriation of the nation's funds. Once in power, the tone was changed—changed, however, only so far that though they were determined to repay themselves for their own labour and exertions, they were equally resolved that no one else should receive more for his labour than they, the Government, were compelled to give. For it was

understood that no additional expense would be caused by the appointment of two Finance Ministers, where one had previously sufficed—enough clerks had been already, or would soon be, turned off to cover Mr. Rowe's salary. Probably the same would be done in all the other offices before Parliament again met. Workmen and clerks would be discharged; there would be a great parade of economy, and the Government would take great credit for the same; while the greater part of the saving from the unfortunate servants of a Government, innoculated with 'Liberal' principles, would go to the increased number of Ministers and Under Secretaries; and so forth." Poor old woman, she ground out about a column of this style every day. She probably had a manufactory for it, for week after week the tone, thoughts, and wording continued almost exactly the same. She must, however, have known her readers' tastes, or she would not have supplied them so invariably with the same materials, but those tastes were most peculiar, and their possessors most carefully concealed their predilections. Few ever confessed to reading the "Constitutional's" leaders, still fewer

were hardy enough to say the undertaking had been pleasurable.

The latter part of the quotation was correct, *i.e.*, the fact that all the expenses in the different departments were to be cut down, but not the conclusion thence deduced, that the number of higher officials would, *pro tanto*, be increased. The Premier had reiterated in the House that such, *i.e.*, diminution of expenditure would be one of the chief points to which their attention would be directed; his new colleagues had proclaimed to their constituents that it was solely on these grounds they had taken office; and it was rumoured that reductions were proposed to be made in the Navy, which would inevitably lead to the resignation of the First Lord of the Admiralty.

The Waterbridge petition had been heard. The members composing the committee threw themselves into their work, in order that their report might be presented to the Commons, and the order for the Commission of Inquiry be issued before Parliament was prorogued. They sat eight days consecutively. But for the experience of the chairman, who had been trained for the bar,

probably they could not have got through the evidence in the time. It was most extensive and complete, and disclosed a state of corruption and villainy of which none would have supposed an English town guilty. Rosse and Taylor, assisted by Irving, Radford, Benton, Captain Wright and others, worked up the case well, and laid bare in all their foulness the moral plague-spots that had so long infected the borough. All four candidates were examined. The committee congratulated Mulgrave on the disgust for bribery which he had shown at the very close of the poll, and regretted he had not come to the same resolution much earlier. They drew up a voluminous report, in which they found that

- (1) The extensive prevalence of corrupt practices had been most conclusively shown ;
- (2) That neither of the sitting members, nor of the rejected candidates, had been proved guilty of personal bribery ;
- (3) That all the actions of Mr. Avondale's committee had been honourable in the extreme, and that they had employed, in

order to obtain his election, only such means as the law permitted.

The report created quite a sensation. Waterbridge, long notorious in well-informed circles, had never yet been clearly brought before the public. Consequently, not only in the House, but in general society, was it the topic of conversation. The whole affair was unfortunate for Mr. Maitland, doubly unfortunate for his Irish Chief Secretary. Percy Mulgrave was placed in a most anomalous position. He was a Member of Parliament, and yet not a member. He could not, durst not resign, either his seat or his office. The House would not sanction the former, to do the latter would be construed by most as a plain confession of guilt. Warm debates took place on the presentation of the report. The friends of the Ministry invited discussion, and prolonged it as much as possible in order that the session might end before the appointment of the Commission; but they could not openly advocate this, and, therefore, thanks to the efforts of the Tories and of those Liberals who were anxious for purity of elections, on the 6th of August was issued the Commission. On it were named Coste, Q.C., a

well-known barrister, distinguished for his placid temper and thus admirably fitted to be the president, Grim Growler a man, distinguished as already remarked for anything but placid temper, and Warmfield, a promising "junior," gentlemanly and suave, of about forty.

CHAPTER XV.

AVONDALE became still more famous, and his friends took good care that he should profit by the notice he had acquired. He was a frequent visitor at Wharfedale House. The Marquis and he were drawn together as by a species of mental attraction. The former recognised in the latter a young man of ability and tact whose ambition he might encourage and gratify, and at the same time turn it to his own exaltation. He was not himself possessed of the patience, and acumen, and wit indispensable to a great statesman, nor was he over anxious for such a position ; but he was nevertheless well fitted to be a leader, and had not the slightest objection to take the Premiership and to do the honours of it, if skilful subordinates, able to pull the strings that keep a party together, would relieve him of the labour incidental to such a post. This labour, subordinate and slightly esteemed as it is, he well knew

to be the very soul and life of success ; it must be performed by some one endowed with more than usual discretion and zeal ; and he was acquainted with no one better suited for such a task than Avondale. The latter's sentiments in respect of the Peer may be described as correlative. He did not, perhaps, form quite as high an opinion as he ought of the Marquis' talents, though he could fully appreciate his influence in society and Parliament. Nor did he estimate accurately the difficulties that would meet him in the course he had marked out—the opposition the world offers to all first attempts, and the exultation it expresses on the slightest failure, the contempt older men have for youthful genius, and the fierceness of the rivalry that success arouses. But these corrections apart, each began instinctively to consider the other as supplementary to himself.

They were lunching together towards the end of July,—

“ I am alone, you see, again, Avondale. One would think my people run away when you are coming.”

“ Oh, no ; I am not important enough for any one to trouble about me.”

“ Humility is a great blessing, my young friend, and it is difficult for any person to have too much of it. But I have no doubt your humility causes you to look to something more than a simple seat in the House.”

“ No doubt, my lord—you would, I hope, not be disposed to throw cold water on youthful aspirations.”

“ Not at all; quite the contrary. By the by, I have intended to ask you several times what you are going to do with yourself during the next three months ?”

“ I am going to Scotland first with Mr. Jardine for a week or two. He leaves town next Monday, and then, I suppose, back home during September—Stuart Jardine is coming with me for some shooting. I am not going on the Continent, unless I should run across to the Italian lakes during the latter part of August.”

“ Well, if you are disengaged then I shall be glad to see you in Yorkshire. We shall be at Egremont Towers till the end of August, and it would give me great pleasure to see you there for a week or ten days on your way back from Scotland. September and the beginning of October

we shall spend in the Italian Alps, near Maggiore, where Wyversley will join us."

"I shall be delighted with the honour. I have heard so much of Wharfedale and Bolton Abbey that I have often thought of paying the neighbourhood a visit."

"I have no doubt you will enjoy yourself if you like the hills; and I believe you once said you had been brought up amongst them. Have you learnt the latest *on dit*?"

"I am not certain—is it that the Marquis of Exmoor intends to resign?"

"Yes. He won't, however, do so yet, though he may before Christmas. He will be staying with us about the time you are there, so that you can make his acquaintance. You will soon know almost enough to make up a Cabinet."

"Almost enough, my lord," Avondale replied, with a quiet smile.

"Quite enough, I dare say, with the assistance of your own adherents."

"Perhaps so—there are several months before Parliament meets again, and who can tell what may happen meanwhile."

"Who can tell?" rejoined Avondale, "The

germs, already existing, of a party may have fructified and increased to large plants. Your lordship will, however, have to form your plans by the end of September. The weeks and months quickly slip by."

"Very quickly; but nothing can be done till about that time when the people will be coming back from the Continent—that, is supposing anything were attempted."

"My lord," said Avondale, "there is no need for us to talk in parables. You have already gone too far to recede without some loss of credit. Some persons will praise or blame you for Kerr's resignation. Very many will consider, and do consider, that you sent me to Waterbridge, and they say that you have thereby exacted good punishment from Maitland. Will you or not go on in the path upon which you have placed your foot?"

"That is rather a direct question, and I am scarcely prepared to answer it."

"You will answer it in the affirmative, or there would probably be another leader selected before September is out to head the opposition that will be created for the next session. Jardine, Kerr, FitzHenry are close friends, and Bransdon is

also intimate with them. Kerr can secure Tintern, FitzHenry can bias Sir Edward Pilgrim, and these two together can win over Herbert Williams. That is not a bad list to commence operations with. It won't be difficult for these men to obtain a chieftain. If any one else refused, his Grace of Lincoln would eagerly jump at the proposal."

"Lincoln!" exclaimed the Marquis, somewhat startled, "has any proposal been made to him?"

"I think not. I believe no one but myself has any definite idea what is to be done. I have not seen Kerr lately; he has been out of town, and therefore do not know his views. FitzHenry is too much occupied with his practice, and I dare say he has not given the matter more than a passing thought; but were he a rich man, no better leader could be found in all England. Jardine will follow, but would hesitate to be chief. Bransdon has not the personal influence requisite for such a post, and probably he has scarcely comprehended the exact position of parties. Does your lordship comprehend the position?"

"I believe so," answered Wharfedale smiling. "But we must put off business till to-morrow, till a couple of months' vacation has recruited us.

By the by, there is a subject about which I hope you will permit me to speak to you. I have often intended to do so. Excuse my asking, if it is at all impertinent: have you any idea of getting married?"

"I can hardly say; probably not. A young man has little time to fall in love, and he certainly can never allow sentimental considerations to stand in the way of his advancement."

"Don't style the yearnings of the heart mere sentiment. Pardon me if I have pained you. Your tone had a bitterness that was not quite natural. I was incited by pure care for yourself to put the question I did. I had hoped you had before you the goal that more than ambition urges on a youth to great deeds. You do not yet know the force of your own passions. I can see that they are deep, but their very depth only increases their strength. You may not unlikely be some day alarmed at their intensity, perhaps even shocked at their results. Pray God your affections may be turned towards a proper object. Heaven pity the woman if they are not, and you too. It will be destruction to her, ruin to yourself, and, may be madness to both."

The Marquis had spoken very quickly. He stopped and added more calmly, "Don't think I am preaching. I have had long experience with men. You have the elements of greatness about you. I would warn you even against yourself."

Avondale was much impressed by his friend's words, and still more by his manner, and he answered in subdued tone,

"I fully appreciate your lordship's kind interest in my welfare, and I trust I shall ever merit your good opinion. I know my own head, but probably not my own heart. I may already have loved and been deceived, or I may have only fancied I loved. But I think passion will with me be always second to ambition."

"It will not, Avondale; it will not. You mark my words. Take care of your passions, I repeat it. You may be carried away by them long ere you are aware of your danger. Youthful genius never does know itself. Look at Shelley's story; look at Byron's; but his, fortunately, you have never heard in all its atrocity. God alone is acquainted with it; man, I trust, never will be. Well, let this be, let us pass to less personal topics. You are going to Scotland, you say, next Monday?"

“ Yes.”

“ The 24th. If you stay there three weeks you can give us nearly a fortnight on your return. We shall not be leaving till the end of August. Not many visitors will be staying with us, as most people will be away on the Continent, but from the middle of October we shall have a full house, and you must join us then for some long period. Is Miss Avondale going to Scotland? I hope so, as Lady Wharfedale is especially anxious to become intimate with her, and you both must stay at Egremont on your return. She intends, I believe, to call on Mrs. Jardine to-day in order to run away with her for a drive.”

“ No, Elith has been away from my father such a time that she is unwilling to leave him any longer, even for a tour in Scotland.”

“ I am sorry ; it would have been a great pleasure for us to have seen her at Egremont. But she must give us a visit on some future occasion.”

CHAPTER XVI.

THE Marquis was not wrong in detecting a bitterness in Avondale's words when he spoke of love. Miss Dawson had lately exhibited a coolness that pained and surprised him. It need not have surprised him; for, in the first place, the young lady had never manifested any great amount of affection for him, but love is truly ever blind; and in the next, had he been as thoroughly acquainted as he ought to have been with her character, he would have seen how selfish, unsympathetic, and ambitious for mere notoriety she was.

In this respect his usual acuteness and discrimination were at fault—but did ever an individual, deserving the name of man, discern in the being that had won his affections, aught but perfection? And if Miss Dawson had not won Avondale's affections—and she had not, willing as he was to think she had—she had, at least, aroused and excited them, given them an

impulse which, later, might cause them to be developed in all their overpowering fury, just as the pebble, crusted with snow, that is started from the mountain top, becomes, ere it reaches the valley below, a huge avalanche that mingles into one confused heap of ruin men, houses, flocks, vineyards, and itself. Matters had come to an issue between them two or three nights before. Avondale, at a ball, had prayed her to discountenance the attentions of that hideous fop, Lord Killarney—"People will say you are the rival of Kate Vandeleur in his affections."

"Excuse me, Mr. Avondale," was the reply, "but I think you are totally forgetting your good manners in applying the term 'hideous' to the appearance of any friend of mine, and you are presuming on our acquaintance in venturing to lay down rules of conduct for me."

"Miss Dawson, you speak very coldly; more coldly, I hope, than you intended. Will you oblige me by discouraging this aged *roué*. My dear Fanny—"

"Miss Dawson, if you please, and, if it will not inconvenience you, to give me the proper style."

“Miss Dawson, then—I beg your pardon. This man is really scarcely an eligible acquaintance for a young girl. If I might merely, as a casual friend, venture to suggest—”

“Oh, really, Mr. Avondale, I think I can take advice with myself. I am much obliged to you, all the same. But if we continue this *tête-a-tête* any longer it will be reported that you are a rival of Lord Killarney in my affections.”

With a light, half scornful laugh she left him, and, a few minutes later, she was waltzing with the “hideous” fop, he being about as active as an animated letter-box, or a tailor’s dummy.

After leaving Wharfedale House Avondale met Wyversley in the Park. They sauntered down the Row which was already somewhat thinner than a few days previously. The heat, of late, had been almost tropical, and, consequently, many families, earlier than usual, had left town. They, however, found it still well filled, and amongst the gay throng they recognised many a friend.

“So you are going to Egremont. I am very glad of it. You are sure to enjoy yourself; the scenery around there is splendid, and, what is

fully as important, the associations are most interesting. I like the hills just as much as yourself, but for the exactly opposite reason, contrast not association, because my own county, Nottinghamshire, is so abominably flat. Don't forget, however, you are going to pay me a visit there. I shall be back from Switzerland by the commencement of the pheasant shooting, and I shall expect you to join me. Jardine and Brayclift have agreed to pay me a visit, and several others—Tintern one; you will be able to look after both kinds of sport at once—and we shall have a jolly party. My mother, too, will, of course, have some of her own friends; old stagers to keep us in order, and bright eyes to enliven the evenings."

"Why, Wyversley, you are quite poetical—must congratulate you."

"Thanks, glad you say so. I was also going to tell you I am off for Norway next week."

"Norway! You will enjoy it. It is new ground, and the rocks and waterfalls are magnificent. You are going alone, I suppose?" he asked, rather slowly, after a slight pause.

"Alone? Yes—that is as far as you mean,"

he replied with a faint smile. "I keep clear of womankind this time. There is only one I should care to ask to accompany me, and her I should hesitate to take. Two old college friends are going, Horford and Charlie Havilland. You know them?"

"Slightly. I have met them with you several times."

"See, Walter," exclaimed Wyversley, a few minutes later, "Lady Campion is bowing to you. That's a fine pair of bays she is driving, and she handles them well. What an abominable shame that she should be tied for life to such a boor as Campion. Poor woman, her pale face tells how bitterly she has been disappointed in her husband. Yet, he was, at the time of their marriage, one of the handsomest and wittiest men in town. How it is he is altered to what he is now nobody knows."

"Brayclift will be his counterpart ten years hence."

"Brayclift won't exist ten years. He has not such a constitution as Campion, and he is living a great deal faster, and trying it much more than Campion ever did his. For Campion's

vices are purely coarse, farmer-like sensual indulgence in eating and drinking.”

“His wife’s lot must be, to an intellectual being like herself, unmitigated torture.”

“Yes; she is most accomplished and *spirituelle*, and there is yet in her melancholy countenance, relieved as it is by the piercing eyes and jet black locks, which Lady Wharfedale says secured for her, in early days, troops of admirers—there is still remaining beauty enough to fire an ardent heart. Take care of yours, Walter; you will be thrown much into her company. You are older than your years, and she may be younger than her own.”

“Thanks for your caution, but I can hardly afford to fall in love yet.”

“My dear fellow, what is the matter? You never speak in that grating tone save when you are dreadfully annoyed. I was only joking. What has put you out?”

“Nothing particular. I did not imagine any one would consider me annoyed.”

“But you are. And ‘you can’t fall in love yet.’ I thought—I see what it is. You and Miss Dawson have quarrelled.”

“ Perhaps so.”

“ I could almost say I hoped so. You and she would not be well fitted. She is, if I may venture to say so, without offending you, a girl without any heart or any consideration for any one save herself. I have seen her more than once during the last month, and certainly have not appreciated her. Mrs. Jardine does not admire her, so Mary Jardine told me in confidence last Tuesday, at Risborough’s. Don’t be angry at my putting my own ideas clearly before you ; you have often enough acted as mentor to me.”

“ Not in the least, Wyversley ; but I am, I confess, put out by this matter more than ever I intended to allow myself to be by a woman’s whims.”

“ By the by, why were you not at the ball that evening?”

“ So I was, but left early.”

“ Oh—I was going to say she was dancing and flirting all the evening with old Killarney ; but, I suppose, you saw more than enough?”

“ Yes, heard—much more than enough. But let us try some other topic.”

They had not proceeded many steps farther

when Avondale exclaimed, with a gloomy and scornful smile—

“Look, Wyversley, what a pleasing *rencontre* for me, the youthful peer gallantly escorting the fair lady—damn them both. Good-day.”

With a fierce exclamation he left his friend and walked rapidly towards the avenues in Kensington Gardens, a spot which most of any in London he delighted in. Even as he turned his back on the Row, Miss Dawson and Lord Killarney cantered by, the former glowing with the ride, and gratified with the looks bestowed on her and her escort by the loungers, the latter wheezing asthmatically, and painfully breathing, through the exercise being considerably more acute than was his wont. Avondale cooled his temper by an hour's stay amidst the elms and beeches in the gardens, and then went back to his chambers, whence, after dressing, he set off to Mr. Jardine's, where he was to dine. Miss Jardine, next whom he sat at dinner, had news for him.

“Edith is going to Scotland with us next Monday; we are all so glad.”

“Edith! How so? Has she altered her mind?”

“No, but we got papa to write to Mr. Avondale—your father, of course—asking him to allow her to go with us; and he replied this morning, saying he had no objection. So it is settled—we are so delighted.”

“You must be, Miss Jardine, to manifest such a high degree of excitement.”

“And Stuart is, too, I can tell you. Look at him now. He is so intent on Edith; he won’t get any dinner himself. There he is taking mustard, which he abominates at all times, with fowl; and, only a minute ago, when John was asking him what wine he wanted, he handed him his plate.”

Avondale smiled. His sister’s pleased countenance alleviated the sorrow, the soreness rather, that was gnawing at his own heart.

Before he left that evening everything was arranged for the journey to Scotland. He thanked Mr. Jardine warmly for the trouble he had taken, but that gentleman said that the girls alone were the active parties, though the pleasure would be, at least, as great to him and Mrs. Jardine, as it would be to them, to have the company of Miss Avondale for some weeks at

Glenullyn. His sister was greatly gratified with her intended visit.

“A change has come over Miss Jardine,” he said to her. “She has been quite lively and piquant this evening—altogether different from her habit.”

“You need not wonder at it. She and Mr. Renshall have this afternoon, at last, come to an understanding. Mary Jardine, I think, must be credited with the happy result. She has blown them up so soundly for their slowness, that the gentleman had no chance left him. They will certainly be happy.”

“No doubt of it,” said her brother.

Yet, though his tone was cheerful, and a smile was on his lip, he could not forbear comparing his love and its ending with that of these two friends of his.

BOOK III.



WHARFEDALE.

W H A R F E D A L E .

CHAPTER I.

FROM London, and its chaos of brick and mortar, to the open country ! From London and its alleys, rank with filth, vile with sin, to the winding lanes redolent of honeysuckle and rose ! From London and its fever dens, noxious and pestilential, to the far stretching chase and the forest glades ! From London, dark, dull, gloomy, over hung with fog and smoke, to the wide expanse of moor and heath ! From London, close, choking, mephitic, burdening as with fetters the young spirits, to the unbounded freedom of rock and mountain ! From London, foul, fetid, plague-struck, sweltering 'neath a torrid sun, to where the health-giving breezes play o'er loch and dale ! From London, resonant with the outcast's cry and the widow's moan, with the famished pauper's dying curse, and outraged

purity's harrowing shriek ! From London, mystery of mysteries, where cheek by jowl in happiest union flourish, christianity and crime, religion and villany ! From London, the chosen domicile of wealth and corruption, of fashion and vice ! From London, man's most famous work, the most glorious of all his undertakings, and, yet, the standing monument of his weakness and imbecility, of his sin and depravity, to liberty, life, and innocence, to the better wishes and the purer hopes that are born only in Nature's own abode, and under her arch of blue.

Oh ! the joy of escaping from the Metropolis in the height of summer ! None can appreciate the sensation save those who have felt it—none save those who, as the burning days have elapsed each after each, have, with still increasing eagerness, looked forward to the moment when they can rush away from the modern Babel to Italia's lakes, or Cambria's hills, to Scarborough's silver strand, or the Grampian's lovely glens—none, save those who, in fancy, are even now straying adown the fairy's walk, or by the warbling brook, straying, but not alone ; or are lingering silently in the full-moon's light amidst time-worn ruins

lingering with the being whose presence is Paradise, whose slightest touch thrills every nerve—silent, yet with the heart speaking as tongue never may.

Avondale was doubly desirous of leaving town—desirous of refreshing and invigorating himself, desirous to withdraw, at least for a time, as much as possible from all that reminded him of his own love, as he considered it—feelings of disappointment and consequent vexation would be more correct. It was, therefore, with unalloyed satisfaction that, on Monday evening, he seated himself in the Great Northern express, bound for Scotland. His sister was with Mr. Jardine, and the rest of the family, in a saloon carriage; Stuart and himself occupied a separate first-class compartment.

It was a calm, glorious evening, in the midst of the very hot weather for which that summer was so noticeable, and so warm and pleasant that, save for a short time between one and three, the windows were not put up.

Any journey by night seldom fails to arouse in an intellectual man unusual feelings. On and on we go, into and through the darkness, over

river and plain, by wood and hill, on and on and on, without stop, or stay. The rumbling of the wheels, and the labouring of the engine, are the only sounds to be heard. Past village and town, the dwellings of our fellows we flit, but quietness hangs over them now. Everything is at rest; and, if the wind shakes the trees, they utter strange sounds, differing from those given forth by day, as though stirring uneasily and in pain, aroused from their wonted repose. The mystery of silence enwraps us, and awe-inspiring darkness invades the soul. Yet the motion given to our bodies recalls to our mind the triumph of humanity over nature. The one is active, living, real; the other is quiescent, torpid, potential.

On such occasions it is that we can appreciate most vividly the idea of death and its outgrowth—annihilation. Somnus is the brother of Mors, it has been said. With much greater truth may it be affirmed that the repose of nature is the death of humanity, viewed from one aspect; and the so regarding it would assist immensely our comprehension of other connected and allied problems. Vast is the sympathy between our spirit and the animated external world—reduce the latter to

stagnation, and the powers of the former seem both partially suspended, and altogether modified; obliterate, abolish, extinguish the one, could the other survive?

Many a thought of this kind passed through Avondale's brain as he was hurried along. His reflections, when alone, not unseldom directed themselves to the unsolved questions of spirit and matter, of the origin and purpose of man and the universe, of the capabilities and limits of the intellect; and, whenever a fit of melancholy seized him, it was on these subjects that his mind expended itself. He had been, since his quarrel with Miss Dawson, abstracted and gloomy, and, though he tried hard to assume his usual liveliness and wit, yet the Jardines, with whom he was so intimate, had not failed to notice his depression. They, however, deemed it best not to add to his vexation with ill-timed condolences, but left his sister, to whose advice and sympathy he ever willingly and fondly listened, to be his comforter.

He mused, speaking little to his companion, during the first half of the journey, as they went out into the beautiful country, ripening for harvest, away from the soot, and din, and bustle of

London. Hitchin, Huntingdon, and the fens, were soon left behind; then Peterborough, Retford, Doncaster, and a score of little stations; and they arrived at York in the grey morning light. Over the plain they sped, and at Darlington came into the Great Northern Coalfield. Here our hero brightened up a little. He was now amongst scenes in which he took much interest. Through this rich mineral area they rattled, passing by many a colliery and many an ironwork whose names are familiar to mining engineers as those of their own children, by Ferryhill, Leamside, Fencehouses, Pensher, Washington, Usworth, and Felling, leaving on the right Hetton, Murton, Seaham, and Monkwearmouth, and on the left, in the valley of the Wear, Durham, and its ancient cathedral. Many of them he had visited two years before, and he pointed them out, and described their surroundings to Stuart Jardine, who was only too glad with the opportunity for talking, as he had been, from pure want of occupation, smoking--a habit which Avondale had never acquired--till he was almost ill. The first glimpse of the sea is caught at Acklington, and from Holy Island to Edin-

burgh the railway winds along the shore, sometimes on the very brink of the cliffs, overhanging the waves, and within a few yards of the water's edge.

The vast reach of ocean, dotted with a few ships, and the cool, early breeze, that just rippled the surface, restored Avondale to much of his cheerfulness. The conversation that had been begun was well continued, Jardine being now the cicerone, as he was well acquainted with Alnwick, Lindisfarne, Berwick, and the Northumbrian coast generally, whereas Avondale had merely passed through the district a few times on the railway. From Edinburgh onwards the express becomes an ordinary train, but Cambyn station on the Highland railway was reached at length, and thence a drive of a dozen miles brought the party to Glenullyn.

Glenullyn House is situate on the side of a low hill, that bounds Loch Ullyn at the entrance of a small, narrow glen, thickly covered with firs and larch. It is placed at the end of the loch, here three miles long, and high enough to command the entire view of it, as well as of the moors beyond, and on the opposite side. Mr. Jardine had

bought the estate, some 30,000 acres, immediately on his return from Australia. Only a small percentage of it was suited for agricultural purposes, chiefly sheep grazing. The remainder supplied splendid cover for grouse, and it was for the game that Mr. Jardine had purchased it.

CHAPTER II.

THE days passed rapidly and pleasantly at Glenullyn, and Avondale recovered health, and freshness, and vigour. Politics for the time were at a standstill, but though very many members had left town, the session, through one cause and another, dragged on till the 10th.

Said Mr. Jardine next morning, at breakfast, "The session closed yesterday. To-day's Edinburgh papers will contain the Queen's speech. I am rather anxious to see it."

But when the papers came about the middle of the day, the speech turned out to be of the usual common-place description, and contained nothing which they had not previously surmised. Her Majesty—or rather those who compiled the document in her name—briefly recalled to the recollection of "My Lords and Gentlemen" the various occurrences of the past session. "There had been peace with everybody and everything

—the relations between the various portions of the empire had been most satisfactory (scarcely correct, both Melbourne and Sydney had seen some little agitation, and some few meetings held to object to various Acts of the Imperial Government). Some good measures had passed and some had not, and others had been thought of though not proposed.” Then came the stereotyped thanks to the Gentlemen of the House of Commons “for the loyalty with which they had voted ample supplies for carrying on, &c.”

Finally “My Lords and Gentlemen” were dismissed to their homes, with the recommendation that they would think over—well, just what they pleased for the next six months, “when the Government would have ready for them a general scheme of taxation, bills on the subject of the National Church and Education, and various other matters.”

“I fear you are not much enlightened, Mr. Jardine,” said Avondale.

“Can’t say I am. Still they promise, as indeed they have been compelled to promise, to touch three dangerous topics, General Taxation, Church and State, Education. Each requires

delicate handling, and might lead to the downfall of a well-established Ministry."

"And no one will say the present one is well established or firmly united. Exmoor and Sloe, Williams and Blocke Head, Pilgrim and Rowe—these are neatly assorted couples."

"You meet Exmoor at Egremond, I believe?"

"Yes, but of course nothing will be done till after the return of the Marquis from the continent in October."

"Nothing will be done" said Mr. Jardine, smiling. "I presume then, Walter, you at least have no doubt about the feasibility of getting up a party. We have scarcely spoken plainly before—we may as well do so now."

"I have no doubt at all. All depends on the two or three—you, the Marquis, Kerr, FitzHenry, Bransdon; why, with myself, it's half a-dozen already—who have tacitly entered upon the enterprise, showing that you possess tact, energy, patience,—on your being in a word true to yourself. Full preparations must be made during the vacation. If we can before Christmas detach Exmoor and Pilgrim, little chance will the Mait-

land Ministry have of holding their own through another session."

"Probably not, probably not. But, Walter, you seem to me to wrap yourself up almost too much in ambitious schemes. Even now, during this beautiful weather, when every one is thinking of naught else but enjoyment, your sole relaxation consists in laying out your proceedings for the coming half-year."

"One can't change one's nature."

"Of course not, at least not easily or without the application of counter incentives. Yours, perhaps, will change some day when you come across the heart that blesses your 'life with true believing.' I am sorry your visit is nearly over, but trust you have enjoyed yourself."

"Very much indeed. I scarcely know how to thank you and Mrs. Jardine for the pleasure Edith and myself have experienced. I fear you won't find so much to delight you in Lyddonshire."

"We shall, I have no doubt. Lyddonshire is a part of England new to me ; I should, therefore, apart from any other consideration, be interested

in the trip; and no fear that Stuart and Polly will fail to be delighted."

A week later Avondale and his sister bade adieu, with many regrets, to Glenullyn and the Highlands. Walter took his sister through that famous part of Scotland—The Trossacks, Loch Katrine, Loch Lomond, and the Kyles of Bute—which was altogether unknown to her, but familiar to himself. After spending a few days in Edinburgh, they travelled together as far as York. Thence Walter went west through the county to Pateley Bridge Station, while his sister, with her maid, went on to London, which, though not a very direct route, was perhaps the quickest mode of getting to Lyddonshire. Miss Avondale stayed the night with a friend of Mr. Jardine's, who met her at the station, and saw her safely off next morning by her own train.

CHAPTER III.

Who may attempt to depicture the glories of Wharfedale? Poets have sung of them, and painters have exhibited on canvas one or another of its loveliest spots, but the most skilled pen and the deftest pencil convey only a poor idea of the reality. Rugged hills, whose summits pierce the sky, mountain torrents broken by many a cataract, barren moors sublime from their very wildness, form a tableau which, for picturesqueness can scarcely be surpassed, relieved and chastened as it is by the peaceful dells and the fruitful valleys in the lower parts. To Nature this is due—man has completed as far as in him lies the enchantment. History and romance, the remembrance of stirring incidents, and the belief in legendary narratives, speak as distinctly and impressively to the inner soul and the deep-seated intellectual emotions of the spectator as the external material reality that meets his eyes

does to his more sensuous feelings. The feudal castle is there that recalls the time when England's sovereign was but a King among Kings, and there the beautiful abbey whose ruins, catching a more bewitching loveliness from their very desolation, tell, as words may never tell, of a widow's maddening grief for the loss of her only boy.

Egremond Towers, a vast pile of buildings, half Norman, half Elizabethan, is situated on the west side of Barden Fell, and a half mile along the left hand bank of Wharfe. Dark with the wear of centuries, and undefiled by modern innovations, it looms out like the abode of some giant that watches over the dale lying beneath. The original seat of the family was six or seven miles to the south, on Rumbles Moor, a corruption of Romille, the surname still borne by the family.

William de Romillé, one of the Conqueror's bravest followers, received, on the partition of the kingdom among the Normans, large possessions in the North and West Ridings. At Skip-ton he built one castle, and on the moor named after him another, which, from love for the chase

and falconry, he made his chief residence. His son died, leaving an only daughter, Cecilia, who married William de Meschines. These established a priory for Augustin Monks, at Embray, close by their castle of Skipton, in order that Heaven might bless their marriage with an heir. Their prayers, however, were unheard, and they died leaving two daughters, Cecilia and Blanche. Cecilia married William FitzDuncan, a nephew of the Scottish King David, defeated at Northallerton, in 1138. They had an only child, a boy, who, as is related in Wordsworth's well known poem, was drowned while attempting to leap across the "Strid," a spot in Barden Woods where Wharfe is contracted into a chasm but a few feet wide. To his memory the bereaved mother erected the noble Abbey of Bolton, and removed thither the Augustin monks from Embray.

The stately Priory was reared ;
And Wharfe as he moved along
To Matins joined a mournful voice,
Nor failed at even song.

This branch thus extinct, the estates went to Blanche, whose husband, Roger Dacre, Lord of Dacre and Ripley, had received with her the

Baronies of Egremond and Thornthwaite, lying on the east of Wharfe. He now became the most powerful peer in Yorkshire, and was created Earl Egremond, preferring it as being the title the Romillés had borne in Normandy, to the Earldom of Skipton, which the Conqueror had conferred on them. He took his wife's designation in addition to his own, and henceforth, till the downfall of the Plantagenets, Dacre de Romillé was a prominent name in our annals. The bearers of it were noted for their unswerving loyalty. They were haughty, arrogant, brave, despising the canaille, and, considering all the actions of their king sanctified by the source from which they proceeded. They supported Edward II. in his war both with the Scots and with the revolted nobles; and the then Earl of Egremond perished at Bannockburn.

His brother, Sir Henri Dacre de Romillé commanded at Boroughbridge seven years later, as guardian of the young Earl, the Romille vassals. Through the misconduct and incapacity of Edward, the Scots had not only thrown off the English yoke, but were also threatening to reduce the northern counties. Again and again they pene-

trated through Northumberland and Durham far into York, and it required all the exertions of this Sir Henri and Earl Percy to repel their attack. In the first year of Edward II.'s reign they reached the Cathedral City, and affixed over the porch of St. Peter's the distich—

“Long beards heartless, painted hood witless,
Gay coats graceless, make England thriftless,”

in allusion to the English dress and long beards.

“Christe's dethe!” exclaimed Sir Henri, as he rode into the town two days after the invaders withdrawing on rumour of his approach, “Christe's dethe! but these half-starved barbarians shall wipe out the insult with their blood.”

He took down the slip of parchment and placed it on his helmet, as young men would put their lady's glove.

Next year occurred, at this same city, the nuptials of Edward III. and Phileppa of Hainault. The festive proceedings were most gorgeous, but were brought to a rueful close by the disgraceful conduct of the foreign soldiery, who had come as the retinue of the bride's father. They gave such free vent to their passions as to

assault some of the female inhabitants, and to set fire to some of the outskirts of the town. The citizens armed themselves, and called out Sir Henri for aid. He right willingly mustered his men and joined them, and a pitched battle ensued in the Watlingate, in which over 500 of the rioters were slain. Sir Henri offered to defend his conduct by wager of battle with Lord John of Hainault himself, or any one of his peers, but his name was so renowned and his bodily strength was such that none accepted the challenge. Twenty years later, at Neville's Cross, Sir Henri dipped deep in Scottish blood the parchment scroll which he still bore on his helmet. He was then in his fifty-fifth year, and was accompanied by his nephew at the head of a chosen body of his retainers. He commanded the third division of the army, a post for which his long experience in northern warfare especially fitted him, while the savage joy with which he rushed to a *melée* rendered a charge which he led irresistible. The enemy were giving way when he brought up his body for the final *coup*—two hundred knights, sheathed horse and rider in full armour, three times as many squires similarly accoutred, and

two thousand men at arms covered with mail.

“Romillé!” and “Egremond!” rent the air as they dashed on the foe; “the demon of York!” passed down the Scottish ranks as Sir Henri was recognised well in front bestriding a powerful horse, black as jet, which delighted in the fray and in carnage as joyfully as did his master, and which had been, so the common people, as is their wont, said, a present from the infernal regions. The battle already over was transformed into a mere *debaile*. The invaders, scattered like thin mist before the northern blast, and fled precipitously. One or two of the more powerful clans either surrendered in a body or made good their retreat across the country, but the majority perished in the butchery that ensued. Sir Henri died, unmarried, in 1350, and the burgesses of York honoured him with a public funeral in their stately Cathedral.

The son of the earl mentioned above joined in Scrope’s conspiracy, but was let off with life, though some of his estates were forfeited. He never became reconciled to the usurpers, and therefore kept himself apart from political

affairs; but his son and grandson were two of the ablest supporters of the York family. The one was killed at Wakefield, or as was commonly believed, was mercilessly butchered after the fight. Egremont Towers was sacked afterwards, and partially burnt, two of the late Earl's children perishing in the flames. The other, a lad of eighteen, amply avenged his father's death at Towton a few months later. So great was the carnage in that fight that the river Cock ran blood, and dyed for many a mile with a purple hue the waters of Wharfe into which it flowed.

Wharfe, as it rushed through the "Strid," always before calamity to the Romillé family raised a long drawn groan and an unearthly roar which could be heard far up the valley, and on the summits of the surrounding hills, and which struck ominously on the ear even of the most sceptical. But on this dreadful morning the rumble that it ever emits was changed into a melodious air, as though the waters were hurrying eagerly to partake of the tide of blood; and the bells of the stately Priory close by gently rocked, though the wind was still, as if swung by unseen hands; and when it was told the

countess, the aged servants of the house said their lord's murder and the death of his infants were avenged. And ere the following morn messengers came mud-stained and bloody from the battle field to announce the total destruction of the Lancastrians.

Fierce and exulting was the joy of the bereaved widow as she greedily drank in every word of their terrible narrative. Thirty thousand of the Red Rose were down, and in many parts Wharfe, though swollen high by the early spring rains, could be forded on their bodies. But to all this mass of suffering she gave no thought, nor to the wives, now widows like herself, and the mothers bereft of their children; for revenge was the creed of gentle and simple in those rough times, and amongst the more untamed barons animosity and hate were cherished as household plants. Forthwith, despite the prayers and supplications of the monks, she caused a joyous peal to be rung out from the Abbey. But the act of sacrilege drew down God's anger on the house, and the bells which she had rung in glee at the slaughter of her foes, ever after, instead of the moaning of the Strid, themselves foreboded approaching death or

misfortune. At night, when deepest calm had fallen around, they would suddenly set themselves in motion, commencing with a soothing chime and ending with a funereal toll, and all who listened to the dread-inspiring notes were assured that before another sun had set another Romillé would be gathered to his fathers.

Fiercer and more savage grew the pleasure of the stern dame as she saw how all the land for miles round was covered thick with a mantle of snow, and as complete accounts came in of the loss of life, and it culminated when, late in the evening, she learnt that the Earl of Wiltshire had been captured. He had been commander, with the "butcher" Clifford, of Margaret's forces at Wakefield, and had directed the subsequent attack on Egremont. A month later, on the merry May day of 1361, he was beheaded at Newcastle, and on the same day expired the Countess, overpowered by excess of satisfaction at his execution, her decease preceded by the Romillé death-peal which, for the first time on that bright spring morn, sounded forth from St. Austin's Tower.

This same Earl fought for Richard III., at

Bosworth, and on the accession of Henry Tudor was attainted and his estates sequestered, the greater portion, including all Bolton Abbey and all south and west of it, being transferred to the son of Clifford, the Lancastrian, from whose descendants this property passed, nearly two centuries later, into the Devonshire family, its present owners.

The Abbey was surrendered in 1539 to the Royal Commissioners, and by them sold to Henry Clifford, 1st Earl of Cumberland, on the extinction of which title it also went by the marriage of the last Earl's sole daughter, to the ancestor of the Dukes of Devonshire. Henry VIII. restored the grandson of the attainted noble to the barony of Dacre, and gave him back Egremont Towers and the property lying about the upper part of Wharfedale. The second Baron Dacre, in the reign of the maiden queen, rebuilt much of the Castle which had remained in ruins since 1460, enabled to do so by his marriage with the sole heiress of a neighbouring landowner.

The Dacres apparently had had enough of fighting during the Lancaster and York dynasties, and they kept clear of both sides during the civil

war. Under Charles II. one of them became a popular leader, and assisted greatly in securing the throne for William of Orange, from whom he received by regrant the cherished dignity of his house, the Earldom of Egremont. A century later Pitt raised the 3rd Earl to the Marquisate of Wharfedale. He had been a good debater and a skilful tactician, and had rendered the Premier great assistance by his management of the Upper House. The present Marquis was his grandson, and the fourth of the title. His possessions were not so extensive as when his forefathers had been kings of the West Riding, but a succession of good marriages had added greatly to the estates returned by Henry VIII. to the first Baron Dacre, while his wife, the elder daughter of the Duke of Hants, had brought him a considerable property in Ulster. Careful management had also largely developed the resources of his English domains, and especially the mineral wealth of a small tract of land situated in the far-famed Hallamshire.

We have said that Egremont Towers is situate on the west side of Barden Fell. It is several hundred feet above the bed of Wharfe, and is reached by a good, though somewhat steep, car-

riage drive. From the Keep, one of the most perfect in England, a splendid view is obtained all round. North-west and west the hills of Lancashire and Westmoreland limit the gaze, Whernside, Pen-y-gaut, and Ingleborough rising conspicuously among them. South, at the very feet, is the Abbey, and, winding for miles, the lovely dales; farther on Skipton and Rumbles Moor; and in the extreme distance the chimneys of Leeds and Bradford, overhung by the cloud of smoke that is ever issuing from them. East the eyes explore the great plain of the country, York and its cathedral, and the rolling Wolds that stretch away to the German Ocean.

CHAPTER IV.

It was late when Avondale reached Pateley Bridge Station, where Wyversley was awaiting him, and, consequently, the 10 miles' drive thence to Egremond made it nearly dark ere they arrived at their destination.

“ You will, of course, not meet many visitors there now. Several of the county magistrates have put in an appearance ‘to pay their respects’ or whatever they term it. Three or four have come down from town with the Marquis for the sake of the scenery, Count Varchi and his wife—I believe you have met them—Sir Thomas Maddox, the banker, and some girls—I can’t exactly say to half-a-dozen—Lady Campion, her husband will be here by the end of next week—they live not far from Leeds—the Marquis of Exmoor, Chief Commissioner of the Navy.”

They passed under an archway surmounted by a tower, the double gates clanging together be-

hind them, and entered a large rectangular courtyard. Two servants sprang forward to hold the horses, and to take the luggage. A flight of six steps led from the yard to a terrace, and another similar flight to the hall which was thus elevated sufficiently to overlook the court-yard wall. The hall was a grand relic of the feudal times, 120 feet long by 60 wide, its sides wainscotted with oak, and the roof, which was 60 feet from the floor, formed of the same wood. Over the greater portion of the hall there were no other rooms, but 30 feet at the farther end, which were somewhat raised above the remainder so as to form a dais, were situate under the Keep, the oldest part of the castle. The hall was lighted from the roof, and by means of two large windows, one on either side of the door. Opening into it on the east were the dining and reception rooms, and in the rear, the kitchens; on the west the library, the breakfast parlour, and the private apartments of the family. From either side of the dais sprang a branch of the grand staircase, from the first landing of which ran to and over the entrance of the hall a gallery.

This much Avondale was able to observe as

they walked down it, preceded by a lacquey, who, at the foot of the staircase, handed them over to another servant, and this latter took them at once to the drawing room. Avondale was in consternation at the idea of presenting himself in his present state, travel-stained and dusty, before ladies, but his host at once put him at ease.

“Don’t be alarmed at your appearance, my dear Sir. I see you are quite shocked. But I directed them to bring you at once to me. I knew you would be tired, and as it would be late it was not worth troubling to change your dress.”

Lady Wharfedale extended her hand—“I trust you will have fine weather for your visit. You must make the acquaintance of the ladies in the morning, Mr. Avondale. I dare say you will not be sorry to find your apartments—it is a fatiguing ride from Edinburgh, and the road from Pateley is not very smooth. Perhaps, Wyversley, you will kindly take my place, and ask Edwards to show Mr. Avondale the way.”

Avondale was not sorry to withdraw, for he was over punctilious in the matter of dress and neatness, and he disliked nothing so much as an untidy habit.

“Never mind Edwards,” said Wyversley, as they left the room. “He will look after your things, without our seeking for them. He is the groom of the chambers, a capital old fellow, somewhat staid and dignified, and certainly fitted for his office.”

Avondale’s rooms were just over the hall in the Keep.

“I am next you,” said Wyversley. “It is a very good arrangement, that is, if you like it. We must think ourselves great people, for, next to the State apartments, Wharfedale considers this the most honourable part of the Castle. Varchi has the suite on the other side. Ah, here are your things, and the servant appointed specially for you. You have not brought one yourself, I think. Let me see, what is your name?” he continued to the man. “I remember your face.”

“Clifford, my Lord,—Henry Clifford.”

“Oh, yes. You have brought up all the luggage?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“I suppose we shall not want you any more.

Walter, I believe you are an early riser. Perhaps you would like a canter before breakfast?"

"Yes, very much, if it should be fine."

"So should I, too. Then, Clifford, will you have the goodness to have two horses ready by half-past six to-morrow?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Another proof of Wharfedale's—or, Mr. Edwards' discrimination—," exclaimed Wyversley, after the man had left them. "Clifford is one of the favourite attendants. His father is a small farmer on Barden Moor, and, I believe, a lineal descendant from Clifford, of Wakefield. Fortune plays strange games occasionally. You will find him very attentive, and when he is not at hand there is my own man, Johnson—you know him—who has been here almost as often as I. We must employ this sitting room as common property, though I trust the weather won't allow us to stay in much. There are only five rooms this side of the tower, as the staircase takes up the place of one; on the other side there are six. By the bye, you are looking much fresher than you were before you went

to Scotland. You were harassed and pale then."

"No wonder. A month's electioneering, followed by six weeks' baking sun in London, is enough to try the strongest constitution, and to take the colour from any one's cheek."

Wyversley might have added "and conflicting passions, and an aching heart." He did not, however, allude to Miss Dawson, as his friend seemed anxious to avoid the topic.

"Ah, oatmeal porridge and salmon trout have agreed with you."

"Yes, amazingly, as they would with any one. But, I am forgetting—how is it you are back so soon from Norway?"

"Cheshunt's father, the Earl of Horford, was suddenly taken ill. His heart is not in perfect trim; he has had one or two attacks, and, I dare say, will go off rather suddenly some day. He is a relation of my mother, and so, of course, I returned with Cheshunt, while Havilland joined himself to another band of wanderers, whom we had come across, and who, in fact, told us the telegram was waiting for us. However, Horford was quite well again before we reached England.

I remained a few days at Wyversley, and then came on here. My mother has half promised to come too. I hope she will, as I am very desirous to introduce you to her. Well, we must separate at once, or we shall go on talking all night. There—it's half-past eleven," as a small, neatly finished timepiece notified the half-hour. "It will be morning before we have had a sound sleep. Good-night."

The morning broke fine, and by the hour appointed the two friends were up. Clifford had the horses waiting, and was ready himself, but Wyversley told him they would not trouble him.

"We will cross the Wharfe and on to Barden Moor," he said to Avondale. "It will be quite far enough for an hour's trot, and you will get a good look at the Castle from the other side of the dale."

The ascent from the ruins to the Moor is very steep, but it is the only point from which to see Egremont Towers in all its grandeur.

"A splendid specimen of feudal architecture, the central part, is it not?" said Wyversley. "All inside the wall stands as it was in the times of the Edwards. The two towers, Sir Henri's on

the east, and Lady Maud's on the west, from which the wall starts, together with the hall and the keep, have had only sufficient repairs done to them to preserve them properly. The wings are much newer. The west—the family side, they call it—was built by the 2nd Dacre, a little after the middle of the 16th century. The chapel—you can just see it, half hidden at the rear—is a fine example of the Elizabethan style. It is reached by a passage from the foot of the grand staircase, and from the servants' buildings behind. The terrace, too, runs along from the library, and ends against it."

"That is a magnificent terrace; and the lawn from the foot of it to the lake is very pretty."

"Yes—it is well covered with shrubs. The lake gives a pretty effect to the grounds. It is of no great size, about twelve acres, but its length makes it appear much larger. It is, however, surprising that there should be so much level ground in such a hilly spot. There are several islands in the lake. On one of them are the ruins of a small oratory, said to have been erected by the Lady Maud, who gives her name to

the West Tower. There is a fountain on another ; it is supplied from the Fell, some considerable distance above the castle, and, consequently, goes up a tremendous height. I believe it is in play now—yes, there it is. You can catch the sunlight falling on the spray.”

“ It is very beautiful.”

“ You will think it is beautiful, when some fine evening you see the sun gradually sink down, his last rays playing on the water of the lake and against the grey battlements, and finally glinting upon the summit of the Fell, after he is himself below the horizon. Ah, now look south—the mists have risen from the dale, and you can perceive a little of its beauty. I must not, however, attempt to exhibit it to you all at once, or I shall deprive the Marquis of that pleasure. He is never tired of showing his visitors the glories of Wharfedale ; and, if the Marchioness has any weakness, it is her love for this grand neighbourhood, and her pride in the past history of her husband’s family. It is getting late. We must hurry back, or the more early people may have finished breakfast, and have dispersed, before we

put in an appearance. This is Barden Tower. It belongs to the Duke of Devonshire, so that we are now out of the Romillé property."

They had been riding along the edge of the moor. Now, descending a rough, precipitous, bridle path into the valley below, they reached the castle in a few minutes' smart trot.

As they dismounted in the court-yard Wyversley pointed out two arched passages leading from it under the castle.

"The way to the stables. You see the building is raised some eight or ten feet above the ground, partly on arches, which, in olden times, were used as stables, storehouses, and, I dare say, dungeons. The stables are at the back now, and the dungeons have gone, with other antique institutions. Rather a neat arrangement, in every way, of our forefathers. These rooms would contain an immense quantity of provisions, and the horses being there, too, there would be no need of sheds and outbuildings for them, breaking the symmetry of the pile. And the castle, being thus elevated, many lives would be lost, even after the court-yard was captured by the enemy, ere these steps could be scaled."

CHAPTER V.

THEY entered the hall—"Prayers over, Freeman?" asked Wyversley of one of the upper servants.

"Yes, my lord. It has just gone the half-hour."

"We are in capital time, then, Walter. The Marquis is a strict Churchman, and not only has service every morning at eight, but attends himself, and makes most of the retainers do the same. Consequently, in the summer, when there are many visitors of a like disposition, we make up a pretty numerous congregation. Breakfast is laid by quarter-past, in proportion to the number expected to sit down, and cleared away by ten o'clock at this season—eleven in the winter—so that you must not lie abed very late, or you will have to grub solus in your own room. I dare say it will be spread in the bay room, that in the east wing looking out on the grounds, so-

called from its large windows. Yes, and by Jove! what a number are here. Where have they all come from? Where are we to sit? It is no use your looking for Lady Wharfedale—you must be content with the company of some lesser star.”

“Good morning, good morning,” he continued, nodding to different persons whom he knew. “Oh, thanks, Lady Campion,” as that lady beckoned to him saying—

“I have kept a seat expressly for you, Wyversley. If Miss Maddox will move a little, perhaps we can find room for your friend as well. Miss Maddox—Mr. Avondale. You know the name, as every one does already. Don’t be astonished if he looks quite an ordinary mortal. One of you men bring a chair, and just place those two or three a little closer. There, that will do.”

“We must be much obliged to your diplomacy,” said Wyversley. “There is plenty of room at the second table, but it is inhabited, Walter would say, by a set of squires, whose conversation will, doubtless, be overflavoured with turnips and hay.”

“Nothing of the kind. You ought not to get into the habit of contemning people merely because they live in the country. Anyhow, they get up early instead of lying in bed till they miss chapel and almost breakfast too.”

“Ah, Lady Campion, your retort is pointless. Walter and myself have ridden across Barden Moor, as far as the tower. We were up long before you were stirring.”

“Oh, I am so sorry. I should so much have liked a ride. It has been so very beautiful this morning. I was not aware that Mr. Avondale cared much for athletic exercise.”

“That is good,” said Wyversley, laughing. “Walter, do you hear Lady Campion?”

“Sorry I did not. I am so interested in Miss Maddox’s conversation, that I have ears for nothing else—and pretty well occupied with this fowl. There must be some mistake about the matter—the mother, or rather the great grandmother has evidently been slaughtered, instead of her descendant; dear me, it is tough, to be sure. I must give it up; and will try to get you a slice from some one else, Miss Maddox. What

was it, Wyversley? Something extremely complimentary, no doubt, as all Lady Champion's speeches are."

"Oh, no; don't plume yourself. She had no idea you cared for riding, or anything of the kind. Rather a joke. Why, my dear Lady Champion, he was one of the best cricketers at Cambridge—he played for his University against England, Marylebone, and Oxford. I don't think you did much your last year?"

"No; I was cramming for the degree."

"You must accept my apologies, Mr. Avondale. You have acquired such a reputation of late that it is excusable if one does not even suspect your greatness in another career."

"You really must have some consideration for my natural bashfulness. I shall otherwise dissolve in blushes, as Niobe did in tears."

"And you must have met him in the Row often enough," continued Wyversley. "His horse is a slight, half-bred chestnut."

"There are so many chestnuts that it is not very probable that I should recognise the horse under such a description, any more than the rider before I had made his acquaintance.

However, I will keep a sharp look out for both in future. I had better make a note of the same," and she drew out, laughing, a tiny pocket-book. "'To watch very carefully for the appearance'—no, 'advent' will do better—'for the advent of a'—let me see, which is the more important animal?—the quadruped decidedly—'of a horse, slim, neat limbs, of good blood, fiery, splendidly caparisoned, &c., &c., &c.; and of a rider, tall, well-made, of majestic mien, intellectual, &c., &c., &c.'" I shall take to novel writing, I think; I could pourtray cavaliers and their steeds almost as well as G. P. R. James."

"It is too bad of you," said Wyversley, "but you will get the worst of it with Avondale. And I shall punish you by handing him this book," as he deftly twisted it out of her hand. "There it is, Walter; I have no doubt there are some other interesting memoranda in it; we will examine it at our leisure."

"Oh, don't keep it," prayed Lady Campion. "Please hand it back to me, Mr. Avondale. It would be very ungentlemanly for you to look at it. If you presume even to open it, I won't ask

either of you to take me for a ride to-morrow morning, as I had intended to do."

"I won't risk such a penalty," said Avondale, as he returned the object of debate. "It is no use, Wyversley, for a man to think of opposing a woman's slightest whim, and of thinking to get off scot free. She would find some method to annoy him, even in heaven, and that, doubtless, is the reason why they are to be excluded from the final abode of the blessed. I have often thought that, in all probability, the fallen spirits were the female portion of the angels, and that it was their petty animosity, and the constant bickerings resulting from it, and not ambition more than human, which caused them to be expelled. The Greeks had evidently the very same idea in the picture they drew of Juno and her turbulent temper and spiteful jealousy."

"Oh, Mr. Avondale! this is abominable!" arose in chorus from all the ladies around, who, having finished breakfast, had been listening to his tirade.

"I told you," said Wyversley, highly delighted, "you would repent commencing the attack."

“And by implication,” continued Avondale, “we derive the same conclusion from the New Testament. ‘There is to be no marriage, or giving in marriage’ in the future state, and it is manifestly impossible that this could happen if women are there. It is of the essence of femininity to have the wishes and aspirations, concerned solely with the idea of union with some higher and more perfect being.” (“Oh! oh! oh!”) “In this world it is, with the great majority, marriage, marriage with the more fully developed fellow mortal; and even when deeper longings seize the soul, and the thoughts turn heavenward, the same end of their existence is recognised—it is still marriage considered under a somewhat different point of view, spiritual marriage—marriage with the Church. It, therefore, plainly follows that in the world to come woman’s soul will be either transformed—she won’t, in fact, be woman any longer—or it will be absorbed into man’s.”

“Shame, shame! He is a regular St. Anthony,” exclaimed the ladies.

“Right, right!—the exact truth!” said two

or three gentlemen who had been near enough to hear the harangue.

“Many a writer besides, Pagan and Christian, will bear me out in my reasoning,” added Avondale, to wind up the argument. “Take Pope, for example. He, you are of course aware, Miss Maddox, was a sworn champion of your sex.” (“Oh, Avondale!” objected some of the listeners.) “It is a positive fact, as witness his most pathetic poem—‘The Rape of the Lock.’ He could not see a lady’s chignon filched, even though it were false, and the thief were some love-sick swain, without rowing the fellow for the assault, and assuaging the shock to the damsel’s feelings—they had feelings in those days, Miss Maddox, however strange it may sound to modern ears—by a tribute of the muse. Well, this cavalier, so gallant, so chivalrous, such a devoted advocate of woman’s claims, speaking of the Indian—so poor, you know, Lady Champion, that he always runs about in dishabille; so untutored that he is firmly convinced there is a God—says that he, arriving at all his conclusions by instinct, which, of course,

cannot go wrong, and not by faulty reasoning,
not only depicts

‘Behind the cloud-capped hill a humble heaven,’

where buffaloes have lost their fleetness, and
opossums do not get into his hen-roost or destroy
his winter stock of potatoes,

‘But thinks admitted to that equal sky,
His faithful dog shall bear him company’—

his dog remember, not his squaw, though undoubtedly said squaw would be of much more service to him in looking after his wigwam and other domestic traps.”

“Mr. Avondale, you are an incorrigible slanderer! We won’t admit you into our company,” exclaimed the ladies.

“And you, Wyversley,” said Lady Campion, “are even worse; you have been encouraging him, and enjoying his harangue. I will tell Lady Wharfedale of you.”

“So do,” replied Wyversley. “Please carry out your threat—I should be so delighted. I should tell her ladyship who began, and I rather think the joke would go against yourself.”

The laughter had been so unrestrained that it attracted the attention of Lady Wharfedale at the other end of the table.

“What is the cause? Who is it?” she asked.

Lord Exmoor was sitting on her right hand, and consequently could see Avondale; the latter being on the other side of the table.

“A young man, I think, who is between Wyversley and Miss Maddox. He has a rather pale, well-formed, intellectual face, and a slight moustache—rather taller than Wyversley. He is amusing them all—apparently chaffing either Miss Maddox or Lady Campion.”

“It is Ralph’s protégé, Mr. Avondale—the genius who is to upset everything and everybody. Don’t laugh, it is the truth. The Marquis is particularly anxious you should know him.”

“I shall be delighted—indeed, I shall. I know the name already. So do many other people—Percy Mulgrave for instance,” he added, with a slight smile.

The speaker, the Marquis of Exmoor, was the eldest son of the Duke of Damnonia. He was nearly forty, as yet unmarried, had been in the House since he came of age; was an easy speaker,

a careful statesman, and a moderate Liberal ; in fact, in many points, almost a counterpart of Wharfedale. He was at present a Cabinet Minister—the First Lord of the Admiralty.

The tables were now becoming deserted.

“ Shall we move too ? ” asked the Countess.

Exmoor and those near her rose. Her husband joined them.

“ Lord Exmoor wishes to see Mr. Avondale,” she said ; but while she was speaking that individual and Wyversley came to them to salute the hostess. Wharfedale introduced the two gentlemen.

“ I hope,” he said to Avondale, “ Edwards has properly attended to your comfort. You will, of course, excuse me leaving you somewhat to yourself. I don’t know whether you care much for shooting, but if not Wyversley will be your cicerone, and you can easily arrange excursions to the different points. The weather promises to be fine ; but if not, I hope that you will find in the library, and picture gallery, and armoury sufficient to interest you for at least one day.”

CHAPTER VI.

SEVERAL of the visitors were already away on the moors after the grouse. In the hall a group of the others had collected, debating on the day's proceedings. Two or three places were named—Simon's Seat, which the ladies preferred, because the path was so steep, and which the gentlemen objected to for the very same reason. At last they decided in favour of this, by the Marquis observing that the sky was beautifully clear, and they might not again have such an excellent opportunity of getting a view. A fair number went, including the host and hostess, Lady Campion and two of the Misses Maddox, Count Varchi and his wife, and most of the people from town—no tourist is as indefatigable as a genuine cockney, or a man who has been enclosed for six months in the labyrinth of a large city. Few of those who were acquainted with the direct ascent would venture, and of those who did attempt it

two or three—Sir Thomas Maddox one—turned back before they had gone far. It was, indeed, rugged and laborious. Servants attended with ponies for the ladies, but most disdained such aid, and struggled on bravely, assisting rather than assisted by their cavaliers. Miss Maddox punished Avondale for his conduct at breakfast. She asked him to aid her, and then a few minutes later when they came to a peculiarly difficult part, nearly perpendicular and covered with loose stones, she said—

“See, mamma has no one to help her—the Marquis is fully engaged with the Countess Varchi—would you be so kind as to assist her a little? I can walk by myself.”

Avondale had thereupon no choice but to take that fair dame in tow. She was fat, fair, and rather more than forty; and he was not without reason somewhat alarmed at the task. But it turned out not so laborious as he had anticipated. Lady Maddox had an Englishwoman’s soul, and it would have carried her over greater difficulties than the present. She had come to enjoy herself, and was therefore vivacious and active; and she was much flattered by Avondale’s attentions,

of the true cause of which she had not in her innocence the least suspicion. Thus they got along capitally, and were among the first to reach the summit, passing about a mile from the top Wyversley and Miss Maddox, who were sitting down exhausted. Avondale saluted them maliciously—

“A case of blind leading the blind, is it not, Lady Maddox? I’m afraid you are not a good walker, Miss Maddox, and was therefore greatly inclined to offer you, instead of your mother, my assistance.”

“Oh, mamma, it is too bad of him. It was I sent him to you.”

“Do you hear that, Lady Maddox? How one’s reputation gets slandered. Apparently these two young people have been leading a cat and dog life this last half-hour, and they will vent all their spleen on us if we wait any longer. But, Wyversley, how glum you are—will you take a pull at my sherry flask?”

“Miss Maddox will, if I don’t. She has been blowing me up because I left mine behind.”

“Why you are but a copy of Mr. Avondale.

I have fallen among enemies—even mamma will not say a word in my defence.”

“Thanks, Walter,” said Wyversley, as he received the flask. “We shall be able to put on a spurt now, and shall catch you before you reach the top.”

But they did not, though they made frantic efforts to do so.

Gradually the party came up one by one, and with the last stragglers appeared Sir Thomas Maddox himself, riding an old sure-footed cob. “The castle was so empty,” he explained, “that I dreaded dying of sheer loneliness before you returned. So I made them pick out for me one of the steadiest animals in your stables, and here I am. I am overjoyed that I have come—what a magnificent prospect lies around!”

He was right. Magnificent was the only term to be applied to the panorama that stretched on every side. The sky was cloudless, and the atmosphere beautifully transparent, save where leagues to the south the forges of Hallamshire sent up their volumes of smoke. The sun shone hot and scorching on the plains below, but here the fierceness of his beams was tempered by the

north-western breezes that came in from the Atlantic over the lakes and hills of Cumbria.

One single feeling filled every breast, a compound of pleasure, admiration, delight. The host and hostess pointed out the most noticeable spots. "There, right away to the north-east, are the Cleveland Hills, and that, the highest point of them, is Rhosberry Topping, within a few miles of the German Ocean. Between us and them is the great plain, and due east are the Wolds—you see them rolling away till distinctness is lost in distance. York Minster rises up in the midst. Here, Countess, I think you will be able to make it out with this glass—allow me to hold it for you."

"West and north-west is the view I admire most," said Avondale. "In what picturesque confusion those peaks and cairns rise, like vast rocks hurled confusedly together by giant hands. They remind one of the clouds we often see at evening near the horizon, broken into fantastic forms by the winds, where in childhood's days we placed the homes of the genii and the palaces of fairyland."

“It is beautiful, most beautiful,” said Lady Champion, who was standing near. “How sharply each rugged crag stands out.”

“Grand,” “splendid, splendid,” “magnificent,” were the half suppressed ejaculations that broke from each gazer.

“It is glorious—it is equal to our own Alps,” said Countess Varchi.

“I am highly gratified,” said the Marquis. “I was certain you would be repaid the difficulty of the journey. Yorkshire is a most interesting county—no other can approach it. Its historical mementoes rival its natural glories. Consider the battles, from Northallerton to Marston Moor, that have been fought on its soil; the Abbeys, Fountains, Jervaultz, Bolton, and the feudal castles whose ruins it contains. See, south of us, a scene rivalling that in other directions—Embsay and Rumbles Moors, and beyond them Bradford, Halifax, Leeds.”

Lunch the attendants soon served under a venerable oak that had not improbably seen four centuries earlier the partial destruction of Egremond. It was a joyous meal. Business and politics

and the thousand and one cares incidental to every-day life, seemed forgotten. Each one added to the general happiness.

“Why is this called Simon’s Seat?” asked Exmoor of the Marchioness.

“I can’t say—I never heard—why is it, Ralph?” she asked, appealing to her husband.

“I am quite as ignorant as yourself; but I believe there is some legend or other accounting for it most satisfactorily. Musty antiquarians, however, who so contemptuously smash up all our pet ideas, assert that the designation comes from one of the Scandinavian heads, Sigmund, who is similarly commemorated on other ridges in England.”

“Rumbles,” said Avondale. “What a strange term!”

“Yes, rather,” replied the Marchioness, smiling. “I believe it is a variation of Romillé.”

“You may add,” continued her husband, “that the country people explain it differently. They say it was the seat of Giant Rumbald, and they point out to you just over Ben Rhydding a deep dent in the rocks where he once, in stepping across from Almes Cliff, eight miles distant, to

the Moor, stamped his foot, having slightly miscalculated the stride."

"Rather a lengthy step," remarked Exmoor, "and rather a change from the honoured name of Romillé."

"Almost as great a transformation," said Avondale to the Marchioness, "as that of Mulgrave into Muggins by the Dissenting minister, and in both cases the result is slightly unpoetical."

"What was that, if I may presume to ask?" enquired the Viscount.

"Have you not heard?" said the Marchioness.

"No! I am surprised—it is really such a good story," and she gave a short account of Mulgrave's religious meetings, amusing the Minister greatly.

"My honourable friend seems to have fallen regularly into the hands of the Philistines. How his dignity must have been ruffled—but I fear you have somewhat overdrawn the picture."

"Indeed I have not—ask Mr. Avondale."

"Of course Mr. Avondale would be the most credible witness—decidedly so," he replied, laughing.

"It is, however, the unvarnished truth," said Avondale.

CHAPTER VII.

THE evening drew on apace. A little past seven they began to descend. Lady Campion and Avondale were taking a final look at the Cumbrian mountains, among whose summits the sun's last rays were lingering, reflected from peak to peak as from so many mirrors, the eastern slopes being thrown into still greater shadow by the contrast, and over which a few fleecy clouds were floating, painted by a magical hand with myriad hues.

"How bright and dazzling it looks," murmured the lady—"like the picture unrolled before a favoured few—the gloom behind, the light ahead, and Paradise above beckoning onwards. While with others—why does God order it so?—how different! Their past is gone as though a dream," her voice sunk very low—"joy and gladness vanished; and the future is misery of misery, the blackness of night uncheered by a solitary beam. Amongst those hills there must

be happiness—and yet everything is deceitful, and the fairer it looks the more deceitful.”

Avondale was on dangerous ground, though he knew it not. His heart, as I have said, was sore, but his pain arose from the overthrow of a cherished hope, on the fulfilment of which he had relied too strongly, rather than from the destruction of a deep-rooted love; from the shock inflicted on his self-conceit, rather than from the insoluble injury done to his affections. A man, however, feels a blow to his vanity quite as sharply and acutely for the time being as one to the all-powerful passion. The difference is that the former passes away and is forgotten in a few weeks or months, the latter not seldom influences the whole tenour of one's subsequent career. Another still more important difference is, that while the latter generally pre-disposes the sufferer against female wiles and female society, the former, as long as the smart remains, renders him doubly susceptible to such influences.

It was so with Avondale. He was vexed, angry, chafing under a slight, and in this state of mind he was thus thrown into the company of a

woman whose character was in so many respects the counter-part of his own. She was his senior in age, but he was far older than his years ; and even her age was that very age when women are in the eyes of many most attractive, when they have put off the uncertain glitter or the robust beauty of youth for the matured charms of full womanhood, and yet those charms exhibit no signs of decay, though it may be that they shine as did those of Clare Campion under a chastened light. Both wanted sympathy—she had nothing to cheer her loneliness, no child, no nephew or niece, no younger brother or sister—he had a sister who adored him, and yet what is a sister's devotion compared to that on which the passionate yearning of a man's heart seeks to expend itself?

Avondale was on dangerous ground—he was on still more dangerous ground next morning, when Lady Campion joined him and Wyversley in their ride to Barden Moor—he was on still more dangerous ground when, that afternoon, they went down to the ancient Priory and rambled amongst its romantic ruins, and under its oaks

and ash trees, and when, as they stood by the Strid and gazed into the waters that had so cruelly destroyed a widow's sole stay, she put to him the question the forester, who had attended the lad, put to his mother,—“What is good for a bootless bene?”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE following day was wet.

“I am sorry,” said the Marquis to Avondale, and some of his other visitors at breakfast, “but you have seen Simon’s Seat and the Priory, and the weather is so changeable in these parts that we ought to be thankful for so much. You must ransack the Castle for means to keep off *ennui*, and pray for the ‘rain, rain to go away,’ which I hope it will do before the day is over.”

The letters had just been brought in. Lady Wharfedale looked over hers.

“Excuse me reading this one,” she said to Sir Thomas Maddox and Wyversley, who were sitting on her right and left. “It is from Mrs. Reeve; she always has some news. Dear me, this is news. You know Reginald, Killarney lives close by her, near Norwich. Well, his lordship is going to marry.”

Wyversley started violently upsetting half a cup of coffee over the reader’s dress.

“I beg ten thousand pardons,” he said, and as Lady Wharfedale stood up to shake the liquid off, he whispered, “say no more ; it concerns Avondale.”

The Marchioness was much astonished, and after breakfast learnt, for the first time, from Wyversley the story of the connection between Miss Dawson and his friend. Mrs. Reeve’s epistle was to the effect that she had just heard from Killarney’s sister, who lived with him, that he contemplated marriage with Miss Dawson, and that the lady’s father and brother had been on a visit to him during the last fortnight.

“Arranging the affair rather suddenly, though if it is true, and it is probable enough, it could scarcely come off for another year. Killarney has not known her, at the outside, three months. And what will become of Kate Vendelour?”

“I hope Avondale will have sense enough not to fret over it. The girl who would give up him for a man of Killarney’s character and reputation, leaving aside his sixty years—he can’t be a day younger—must be utterly void of morality, and even of common sense.”

“Thanks, Lady Wharfedale. I am glad to

find that you can say hard things of your own sex. Had I made such an assertion you would have rebutted it with the plea of the necessity of maintaining a good standing in society, and that a girl may as well marry a Title as not, though said Title may have its disadvantages.”

“Yes, Reginald, and I should probably have also treated you with a long disquisition on the absurdity of the romance with which young people’s heads get filled about love in a cottage, and the like; but I am far from denying the fact that genuine affection can exist between persons of different stations, or between poor people of any station, though, in this, young folks so commonly err; and I should be still farther from asserting that wealth and a Title are a cure for all the ills that trouble humanity. Take yourself, for instance, there is not the slightest need for you to marry either of the daughters of the Earl of Hernthorpe “(God forbid),” but there is all the need in the world that you, or any nobleman, should not follow Lord What’s-his-name’s example, and select an actress or an opera singer to preside over your house. You must choose some young lady of good position,

Mary Jardine, for example, and the quicker you do so the better."

Rather plain-speaking this. Lady Wharfedale, though she was laughing, was very serious at heart; and Wyversley coloured violently at the allusions. Politeness kept him from expressing his annoyance, and before he could find words to change the subject, Avondale joined them. He saluted the Marchioness.

"I must take advantage of the wet day to scribble a few letters. The last two days have been so delightful that I have found no time to write to any one, not even to acknowledge Edith's note, saying she had reached home safely."

"I am very sorry your sister could not spare us a day or two, but you must bring her with you in the autumn."

"She was very desirous to come now, but my father is a rather moody man, and seldom quits home, and, therefore, as she had been away several weeks she could not remain any longer. She has not, I believe, ever been absent from him so long, and though he conceals his feelings, he loves her most tenderly, and is never so happy as when she is at the Hall."

“He will have to part with her before long,” said Wyversley, with a smile.

“*Peut-être*—good morning. I hope to join you at lunch.”

Wyversley came into Avondale’s room about noon.

“It is dreadfully slow downstairs, Walter, rain, rain, rain. I have been knocking about the billiard balls with Maddox and Varchi till I am tired. The ladies have been lamenting over your disappearance; they want you to go with them over the armoury and picture gallery, and tell them all about the curiosities; they take it for granted you are thoroughly up in the history of Egremond, and I dare say they are not far wrong.”

“Yes, presently, Wyversley. Who was it Mrs. Reeve said Killarney was going to marry?”

“What?” said Wyversley, startled, he having hoped his friend had not heard the letter.

“Oh, she mentioned a mere rumour; no one in particular.”

“Who was it, Wyversley, if you please?”

“Why will you bother yourself, Walter? You can guess easily enough; but it was only a report,

and even if true you won't let it concern you, I hope. What have you been about here, my dear fellow?" he said, taking up some sheets of paper containing a few lines of blank verse.

"Nothing in particular, to use your own words, but pray don't look at it."

"Pray allow me," and as Avondale offered no great objection, he read the composition through :—

Yes, I am old, and well men call me stern
And cruel, unmerciful, implacable,
And harsh, who never yet a slight forgot
Nor insult left unvenged. And women, too,
That I've no heart, that I'm a man, a thing
They say, heedless of either love or scorn
Untouched by all their skilfullest arts, unmoved
Amid the wildest, gayest scenes of joy
And revelry, where dancing, music, song,
And wine, and beauty's smiles combine in all
Their witchery to captivate and snare
The soul of fickle youth and gravest age
Alike.
And 'tis the truth they speak, for I am cold
And cynical, a hater of my race,
Although I have not always been as now.

Across my haggard brow will often crowd
Faint shadowy gleams of happiness I had
In boyhood's years beyond compare, and then
Come dreams of those drear days in which I drained
The cup of misery to its bitterest dregs,
And then of wanderings with a load of grief
I never could shake off, and then of wealth
Obtained I valued not, and then of fame
And proudest honours won that brought no ease.

Methinks I live my childhood's hours again,
And round my honoured mother's chair I play
A joyous, careless, merry lad, as in that bright
But shortlived time. Oh, I was happy then!
For care and sorrow had not yet been born,
And golden hopes were mine of future bliss,
And glorious thoughts of never dying fame.
And so the smiling vision fades away.

And then another takes its place. A few
Short years have fled, the boy has almost grown
A man in age, and far beyond most men
In energy and thought and intellect.
But not alone the youth fills up the scene,
Another form is there, and 'tis the spring
Of each, when woman's beauty, man's manhood
Know not a flaw, and she the youth's one thought
With wealth of beauty, grace of form, such as
The dying earth but seldom sees, is blessed.
And high ambition urges either on,
To shine above the common lot; for he
Would wrench from out the world's unwilling hands
A diadem and place it on her brows,
The brows of her who is his guiding star;
But she of her most ardent wish had fixed
As bound, the satisfaction that might be
To those who wear the gaudy signs by which
One mob of mankind separate them
From their fellows. And each the other loved.
But hers was more the feeling dull and chill
That queenly women have for those who pay
Them compliments, and yield the homage wealth
And beauty claim; while he to her gave all
That deep, absorbent, yearning love with which
The young and trusting heart but once can glow,
And which in dying leaves a weary void
That never, never can be filled again.

But soon there comes a change and great the change
From the glad scene that flitted last across
My brain; and yet at times I scarce believe
The sight that next arises up before

My memory's gaze can be though changed by time
The same I last beheld. It rather seems
As tho' I had a hideous fantasy.
Two forms again I see, and one in all
Her bridal finery is dressed ; and one
Within a madman's cell is kept. Amidst
A large admiring high-born group the one
Is standing with the flush of pride and rank
And conscious beauty on her cheek, wedded,
But not to whom she pledged her youthful troth,
For absence, slanderous tongues, aye, and far less
Have power when tinselled pomp and state will woo
To render vows forgot and sever hearts
Once knit. The marriage bells are pealing loud,
And flowers scattered round, and as she leans
Upon his arm, her titled husband's arm,
Her lustrous eyes light up with joy to think
Of all the wealth and pleasures that are now
Within her grasp. For though the man whose name
She bears be old, decrepit, vile, diseased
In body as in mind, nathless the sphere,
The sphere that is a universe to her,
In which, henceforward, she will dwell does not
Despise him, and will yield a welcome glad
Unto his wife. And she will now rank with
The herd of fop and fool, rogue and sot,
Whom for their worthlessness the rest of men
Have branded deep with marks indelible
And relegated to a spot apart
Lest their free intermingling should degrade
The entire race. The sun shines bright out of
A cloudless sky where not the slightest check
To happiness unbounded can be seen—
To what she chooses to deem happiness—
Unless, perhaps, a thought of broken vows
May creep into her brain. The other in
His cell with worse than fiend's shrieks and cries
Appals hard men long used to maniacs' shouts.
And makes them cower with a nameless fear ;
But even they dread more to hear the peals
Of laughter, horrid, sickening, demon like

That oft at depth of night burst thro' the air
Followed by rending fits of weeping, yells,
And groans, all intermingled—'twas a sight
To scare the devils, and make angels sad—
My God, what had I done to suffer it ?

A wanderer next appears—a proud, austere,
And melancholic being, that vainly seeks
In foreign realms that gently flowing stream
Whereof who takes the smallest draught straightway
Forgets alike the sorrows and the pains
That he has known, and starts with soul renewed,
With freshened vigour, and with strength increased,
Once more along life's labyrinthine path.
Among the arctic wilds he heedless roams,
But they refuse him rest, and will not grant
A grave. Upon the desert plains he treads,
But solitude and peace e'en there cannot
Be found, though death itself is fled. Onwards
Thro' Eastern climes his wayward footsteps lead
Where flourished in the dread mysterious past
Those dim and wondrous empires that have gone,
And scarcely left a trace behind. These lands
Untired he rambles over, marking not
The strange and interesting spots that lie
Around, for they call up no thoughts to calm
His troubled soul; and reptiles, savage beasts,
Men still more savage, all avoid his path.

A flood of light succeeds, as follows oft
After a darksome night the rosy dawn
In garments clad, rich, wavy, thousand hued,
Among whose fleecy folds the zephyrs play.
A brilliant room wherein are gathered all
The varied multitude that flutter near
A monarch's throne—the courtier with his face
Enwreathed in smiles, or wrapped in gloom,
As suits his Sovereign's whim—the fair young cheek
On which not royalty alone delights
To feast its gaze—the siren's witching eye
That lures on to destruction, swift and sure,

And ridicules the ruin it has caused—
The kings of art and music, science, song,
Who deign to attend upon a majesty
Inferior to their own—patrician dames
With lineage pure and high as his whose sway
Their haughty spirits scarce will bend before.
All these and more are there, and through them moves
One statelier, queenlier, far than all beside,
And men and women, falling back, confess
The magic of her beauty, and her mien.
But, as she passes by, men smile and look,
And hint, and shrug their shoulders meaningly,
And women frown and stare, and speak full low,
And sneer; for, by her, walks one who is not
Her husband, or her husband's nearest friend.

The confused roar of camps and war succeeds
As follows oft after a rosy morn
A stormy day, the clouds quick speeding cross
The sky each after each, and if the blast
Sinks from its rage to calm a moment brief,
The rain in whelming torrents pouring down.
The tableaux shift and alter, but one form
Is ever present and conspicuous,
The form of him who has already thrice
Appeared. He has not found the peace he sought;
He has not gained the grave that was the goal
Of early manhood's eagerest, most intense desires.
But now, assuredly, death will haste to give
The meeting long hoped for; and at the thought
His fiery eye a little of its gleam
Abates, and on his cheek is found again
A something of the tint that years ago,
Before the pallor came, becoloured it.
So foremost in the charge he lightly rides,
As one rides to a feast where he will meet
His ladylove, and leader to the breach
He dashes on with headlong eagerness.
But the dread king, though holding revel high,
Will not invite him to the grim repast,
And he whose shadow blights the life that strays

Within its reach, whose glance to stone converts
The unfortunate it falls upon, whose look
Devours all that attempt to brave its glare
As never yet did lava stream devour
A fertile plain of olives, or of vines—
Even he, the king of kings and lord of lords,
Before whose frown shall mind, time, universe
Unto annihilation crumble down,
Fled, fled, from me, from me, for it was I
That reckless central figure filling all
The foreground of the picture, my own self
As henceforth I have been as now I am.

The boy—the maniac—the wanderer—
I was not these. The boy was happy ever,
I too laugh not unfrequent; but his joy
Was highest when his mates partook his bliss,
While mine is most intense when all around
Are writhing 'neath the press of present woe,
And shuddering with the dread of future pangs,
And when one tribe of miserable worms
Are torturing another weaker set.
The maniac, poor fool was mad from love;
I might be mad from hate; he wept and cursed;
I never weep and never curse—the one
Is woman's solace, when her weapon, spite,
Has useless proved, or 'gainst its wielder turned
Its point—the other is the mode by which
The dolts, who lack the courage to resist
And brains to fight, assuage their maudlin ire,
And at the same time trumpet far and wide
Their shame—so asses bray, and monkeys bawl.
The traveller—he longed for death—I
Would live for aye and watch with gloating eye
The world grow old in wickedness and crime,
Till, at the final flare up in one blaze,
Humanity itself, mind, body, soul,
Shall disappear in direst agony
And leave to him who man created, that
He may enjoyment get from mankind's woes,
The chaos, where pain, suffering, sorrow, grief,

Are unknown, because there no life is found
For other life to torture, on pretext,
Of pointing out the way to righteousness.

Folding it up at the end, Wyverslay said—

“Walter, this won’t do ; you will injure your health, and your prospects, by brooding over this affair. I will not allow you to do so, and had I the least idea what you were about, I would have fetched you down before this.”

“I have merely finished it this morning—I can never rest in pure idleness, and, least of all, now—I wrote most of it in Scotland, one wet day. It is poor stuff, but employment eases one’s mind a little. Give it me, and I will put it in the fire.”

“I won’t give it you, as I am not at all certain you would burn it. But promise me you will turn your thoughts to politics, or anything, rather than let them dwell on this person—do oblige me, Walter. And look at the friends you have, and the future before you—promise me to think no more about her. I ask it for your own sake—I ask it as a true friend.”

The unusual earnestness with which he spoke moved Avondale greatly—

“ You are very kind, Wyversley. If you would only be as much concerned for your own welfare, you would have a much more glorious career than I. I will give you the promise you ask ; and, indeed, I begin to doubt whether I have not mistaken my own feelings—it is not so much grief that I feel, as it is pure, downright chagrin, and vexation.”

“ I hope it is—you will soon get over it.”

“ Probably so ; but I freely confess that at present I am extremely sore on the subject.”

CHAPTER IX.

AFTER lunch they went over the Castle. In the armoury was a fine collection of ancient means of offence and defence, coats of mail, suits of armour, some steel, some inlaid with silver, others set off with gold, battle axes and maces, spears, and long and cross bows.

“What quaint devices are on some of the shields,” said the Italian lady—“griffins and dragons, and giants. Your English knights were always rough and turbulent.”

“As you would imply we are now,” said Exmoor. “We ought duly to acknowledge the compliment.”

“But is it not the case?”

“I believe you are correct, Countess,” assented Wharfedale. “I fear our ancestors had little of the light and grace that Matthew Arnold so earnestly contends for as necessary to make up the full measure of a man. But, really, your

own flowers of chivalry were not more amiable creatures, as witness the wars of the Italian republics, the struggle between Spain and Naples, the Vendettos of the Guelphs and Ghibellines, the sack of Rome, by the Imperialists, when—

‘The black bands came over the Alps, and their snow,
With Bourbon the rover they crossed the broad Po!’ ”

“ That is not exactly what I mean. I do not deny that the Italians of the middle ages, high and low alike, were quite as unmerciful as other nations, perhaps more revengeful and pitiless, but their cruelty was characterised by a certain degree of refinement, compared with the sheer brutality of more northern races.” (“ Ugh—I willingly give them credit for that,” said the Marquis.) “ But neither was it to their relative humanity I was alluding. I was going to observe that our paladins so generally adopted as devices flowers instead of animals—the lily, the rose, the mignonette, the laurel—or simple stars, and crosses, and chevrons. If they took animals, it was such as actually exist, not objects looking hideous, and breathing flame, and so on.”

“ Quite an historical disquisition,” observed Exmoor, smiling.

"By the by," said the Marchioness, "I have two or three times intended to ask you, Mr. Avondale, to decipher your arms. I gave it to Clare, the other day, for her album, but was utterly at a loss to explain it when she asked me."

"I thought it was clear enough."

"Oh, no, it is not—the allusions, of course, I mean. The crest is a broken crown, and over it '*fuimus*'—what does that signify?"

"I believe," replied Avondale, "it refers to the Saxon Kings, from whom Lyddonshire legends trace the descent of the Avondale, 'the middle-class man,' you know, Lady Wharfedale."

"I never said that, sir. Ralph," to her husband. "Ralph, are you aware that we have royalty in our midst?"

"Not at all—when did you make this discovery, my dear?"

"Only this minute." She told him the circumstance—"We ought to run up the grand standard." Then to Avondale—"The horses in the shield, and that piece of holly, or whatever it is, between them?"

"It is a branch of mistletoe," replied Avon-

dale, laughing. "It is in allusion to the British origin of our house. The first part of our name is a British word. Lyddon itself is British—the great district of the Druids—it seems to have been their sacred land, and the Dunnon Hills, far to the south, a kind of Olympus. Several of the peaks are named after Teutates, one of their Gods, corresponding to the Latin Mercury. Over against Morton Grange, many years ago one of our houses, is Pen Toot, *the hill par excellence*, where, no doubt, many a miserable mortal was burnt alive, and where, down to a recent date, young people went a-maying."

"You are quite an antiquarian, Avondale," said the Marquis. "And the horses—why have you those? I am extremely interested."

"For the same reason—if it is any reason at all—as the broken crown—in allusion to the white horse, the national ensign of the Saxons."

"And the motto over the crest—'*fuimus?*'"

"The Avondale in the reign of Henry VIII. added that, after the dissolution of the monasteries. The Royal commission seized on much of his land, under pretence that it belonged to

the Abbey of Fairlieu, and as he was a Yorkist and not a courtier he could get no redress."

"Strange," said the Marquis, "that your history, in that respect at least, should be so much like our own. We were great losers by being on the Yorkish side in the Wars of the Roses, but Henry VIII., in a whim, restored some of the land to Baron Dacre, the second founder of the family."

"Yours had not very probably got so firmly into the grip of the *novi homines* that then sprang up. In Lyddonshire they have a doggrel—

"Popworth, Homan, Rystle, and Vrynne,
When the monks popped out, they popped in—
They popped in and took well nigh all
The lands that belonged to A'nd'le Hall."

"Your neighbourhood must be quite romantic. I should like to see it; you must get Mr. Avondale to send me an invitation."

"You would enjoy yourself very much, Wharfedale," said Exmoor, who had just joined them. "I have been to Sir Charles Popworth's several times, and have heard him quote the lines Mr. Avondale has this minute given. The

Countess de Varchi and I have been having a debate about a suit of armour in that corner. Will you come and decide the question for us?"

They crossed the room; Wharfedale resolved the difficulty, and added—

"The suit is that which was worn at Towton by the young Earl, the son of him who was murdered at Wakefield. I dare say that battle was too far north for any of your family to have joined in it, Avondale?"

"Not quite, Sir. Avondale Church contains the effigy of Sir Walter Avondale, who was slain on Tadcaster Moor."

"How very remarkable! For ought we know, he may be one of the six knights who were buried in the chapel. They were gentlemen who fought with the Egremont retainers, and as they came from a distance, the Countess caused them to be placed side by side with her deceased husband in the chapel. When it was rebuilt the brasses and monumental slabs in the floor were all religiously preserved, but I fear the inscriptions have, from wear and tear, become illegible. You must, however, try to decipher them."

The interest excited by these glimpses of the past history of the Avondale family augured ill for Lady Campion's peace of mind. She had been one of the number who examined the armoury, and had listened to all the conversation with an eagerness she seldom felt, and could not account for. She did not see the precipice which she was unconsciously approaching; and, had her nearest friend presumed to offer her a hint and a caution of the same, she would have indignantly repudiated the insinuation. Walter Avondale was a young man whose name was unknown to her four months ago, and with whom she had been personally acquainted barely half so long. He had genius, talent, capacity, but what of that, though her husband, the choice, not the love of her youth, was a dolt and a boor; and what if his—whose?—future was opening brilliant, while hers lay already unrolled before her, a waste, void, unchanging desert? He had obtained some little reputation, and had aroused in society much interest; and it was not surprising that she, too, felt some interest in his welfare. Interest? It was, though she would not own it, and dared not question her own heart, the yearn-

ing, the anxiety, the love that women have for those with whose very being their own is entwined. Some? It was daily, hourly, growing more and more absorbing and devouring.

CHAPTER X.

NEXT day was fine. Wyversley, Avondale, and others went over the grounds and visited the islands and the ruined oratory on the lake. After lunch, Lady Wharfedale congratulated Wyversley on his new qualification.

“How long have you been a poet, Reginald?”

“I? What do you mean? I am completely in the dark.”

“You were reading the ‘Princess’ last night.”

“Sleeping over it.”

“Sleeping over it, then; I was rather surprised at your reading it at all. This morning I went into the library—I may remark I was not surprised to find your writing desk on one of the tables” (“I am so sorry—I cannot help leaving things about”), “with a litter of letters and paper scattered over it, and ‘Tennyson’ lying by. I locked the desk and sent it to your room; and taking up the poet I was extremely surprised to

find these in it. Look at them, Lady Campion—he must be quite heart-broken. I should not have given you credit for so much feeling.”

“Bother it,” exclaimed Wyversley; “my stupidity again. I did not write those lines, it was—”

He stopped, for he was at bottom more afraid of the result of Avondale’s intimacy with Lady Campion than he cared to own, and he was assured that the present occurrence would not contribute to break off that intimacy. He would willingly have pleaded guilty to the offence if he could have withdrawn the denial he had just made, but it was too late. Lady Wharfedale finished the sentence for him—

“It was Mr. Avondale. I am so sorry, we must not laugh at him; but he is not serious.”

“No; I should say not. Don’t let him know you have seen the lines. I promised to put them in the fire.”

“Were you not doing me the honour of mentioning my name?” asked Avondale, coming from the window where he had been standing with Sir Edward Maddox.

“Yes; I believe so,” replied Wyversley.

“We have been talking about driving down to the Abbey again this afternoon”—not altogether a white lie, as this had been proposed at lunch.

“The very thing. Sir Thomas wishes to see it again, and so does Miss Maddox; and I dare say their mamma would not object. They go back to town next Monday or Tuesday, you know.”

“Agreed,” said Wyversley, “if you ladies have no objection.”

“None, whatever.”

So they went once more to the stately Priory. The same evening Sir Hugh Campion reached the Towers. He seldom stayed there more than a day or two, as it was far too solemn and dignified for his taste. The following day, Saturday, they made an excursion to Ilkley and Ben Rhyddy, and explored the cliffs, and visited one of the hydropathic establishments.

Monday and Tuesday most of the visitors took their departure.

Tuesday evening Avondale had a long conversation with the Marquis, when they finally sketched out their future arrangements. The

Marquis promised to return early in October, and to carefully set about forming a party before the commencement of next session ; he to take upon himself the responsibility and to appear as the prime mover, Avondale to direct the hidden currents and to labour assiduously at cementing the whole. He had sounded Exmoor, but that nobleman, though not a firm adherent of the present Premier, was desirous to give him fair scope, and to see how his colleagues could work together ; and under any circumstance he (Exmoor) was unwilling to discuss politics till after some weeks' leisure and reviving.

“ It won't, however, be difficult,” said Wharfedale, “ to secure him in the autumn. That fellow Sloe will set the whole Cabinet by the ears by the time he has made half a score of speeches to his admiring constituents ; and when he has done this, not only Exmoor, but Kelley, Williams, Edmunds, and Pilgrim, will come over.”

Avondale left next morning. Mr. Jardine, with Mary and Stuart, joined him the following Saturday at Avondale, on which same day the Marquis and Lady Wharfedale, and the Countess of Wyversley and her son reached Maggiore.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. JARDINE was highly delighted with Lyddonshire, so was Mary Jardine; and so it need scarcely be added was her brother, his enjoyment intensified by that feeling towards Edith Avondale, which was altogether new to him, and which was growing stronger and stronger day by day, and becoming more and more a part of his own existence.

The two girls were inseparable, and Stuart, as often as he could find an excuse, was with them. They rode and rambled about the neighbourhood. From the top of the slight elevation at the back of the hall a good view can be obtained of the vale of the Avon, and the country for some miles around.

“Whose house is that away yonder?” asked Mary Jardine.

“It is Brentwood, the seat of my god-father, Mr. Vrynné,” replied Edith. “We will go there

some day—the grounds are fine, well worth seeing; but I am sorry he is not at home. He is gone to Italy with his daughter, his only child, Florence. I am so sorry, as I wished you to know her—so very sorry.”

She was sorry, but on her brother's account; and could she have guessed the circumstances surrounding her brother, that sorrow would not have been lessened. She and Florence had been close friends from girlhood, as their fathers had been from early life, and both had lost their mothers in infancy.

Mr. Vryne admired Walter Avondale, encouraged his visits, and would probably have been perfectly ready to receive him as his son-in-law.

They made up a merry pic-nic a few days after, and visited the grounds of Brentwood House. The gate-keeper acted as their guide. He was a grey-haired man, who had lived the whole of his seventy years on the estate, and was well versed in the numerous legends of the neighbourhood.

“Brentwood, Miss,” in reply to Mary Jardine.
“We call it Burntwood. A great wood in old

times stretched all along the side of this hill and across the valley, from Repton Sheepsleight, away yon to the downs over A'nhead, twenty miles long by six or seven wide; and the Danes burnt it all afore one of the battles."

And the old man went on describing to Miss Jardine the house and grounds, pointing out the matters of interest, and narrating the local legends.

Altogether the visit to Brentwood and the picnic was very enjoyable. Stuart Jardine, however, with the strange selfishness of humanity, was annoyed because Edith Avondale was surrounded by attendants, for each of whom she had a smile; and still more so, because of her intimacy with Charles Vrynné, a distant offshoot of her godfather's family, with whom she danced in preference, at least so he thought, to himself. He was very moody all the way back, though the rest of the company were in the highest spirits. On his sister rallying him, he confessed to her the cause, but she only laughed at him, which did not mend matters; and he took himself off to bed aggrieved and melancholy, hugging his bitter fancies, disgusted with the fickleness of miserable humanity,

and deeming himself the most injured being on the face of the globe.

Strange how a jaundiced eye will contrive to see everything wrongly, and how the mind, when sharpened by affection or warped by suspicion, will put a false construction on the simplest actions.

Thus it happened with Jardine. He had fallen deeply in love with Edith Avondale, though doubtless it was extremely absurd of him on an acquaintance, whose length was measured by hours, to have lost his heart; and it was still more absurd of him to have lost his head and intellect at the same time.

But so it was, and so it ever has been. The most nervously jealous, the most sensitive to slights are the young people whose love is an absorbing passion, springing into full growth at first sight, and taking firm root in a heart hitherto untouched. Their world is limited to the one object of their thoughts, and if but a smile, a look, a glance is bestowed by that object on another they are seized with the biting pains. Alternately elevated to the height of happiness, and plunged in the depths of despair, their

existence is a charming vicissitude of maddening bliss and darkest misery—or they imagine it is, which is much the same—till their hopes and fears alike are swallowed up in enjoyment, or in the torture of disappointment.

Jardine brooded over his trials and his wretchedness, and contrived most successfully to intensify them.

The Newbury flower show came off early in September—one of the annual festivities of North Lyddonshire, to which many go, the rich to patronise the fête, and others to enjoy themselves. Vrynné accompanied the Avondales. He coolly attached himself to Edith as her cavalier, displacing Charles Popworth—though the baronet said, “Ah, Vrynné, if I were a younger man you could not cut me out”—and many others who were fluttering around, among them Stuart Jardine, who, incontinently wrapping himself up in his own grandeur, stalked by the side of another visitor. He was somewhat absent, it is true, and he astonished his companion considerably by replying to her remark in reference to a collection of potatoes, and onions, and carrots in one of the cottage tents, that they

were very fine—"Yes, they smell beautifully." They had a dance after on a friend's lawn—they wind up everything with a dance in Lyddonshire—but he carefully avoided Edith, and would not even join in till Lady Popworth said she wished to dance, and if he did not ask her she would ask his father. His sister blew him up soundly for his conduct that evening, but he told her to mind her own business, not to trouble about him, nobody cared about him—poor fellow!

"But, anyhow, you can show common politeness, Stuart. You were quite rude to Lady Popworth to-day."

However, he liked Mr. Avondale's covers and the shooting well enough, and did not shoot himself or any one else; he ate and drank heartily, his health was not affected, and in most respects he comported himself as a sane and well-behaved Christian.

CHAPTER XII.

JARDINE went from bad to worse. A few days later Sir Charles Popworth's eldest son came of age. Festivities in the usual country style commemorated the event—dinners for everybody, bonfires in the evening, and later a ball, with invitations to half the county.

The Avondales were there, and Vrynné danced with Edith, and what seemed so often to Stuart Jardine—twice—that after making one effort to secure her hand, when it happened she was engaged, he carefully avoided her for the rest of the evening, and stalked through the festive throng with a countenance as expressive of pleasure as is that of a Red Indian when on his way to the stake. Walter noticed him, and was much annoyed at his perversity.

“Well, Stuart, don't you intend to tread even one measure with Edith?” he inquired.

“I fear, Avondale,” he replied, with tremendous coolness, “that Miss Avondale is already engaged. I have asked her several times.”

“Stuart,” said his sister to him next morning as they were on the lawn before breakfast, “if you don’t apologise to Edith before the day is over for your incivility to her last night, I will ask papa to send you off home.”

“Incivility! what do you mean?”

“Mean? Why, that you behaved as if you were utterly devoid of politeness and good breeding. Everybody remarked it, and I almost cried about it. You, a visitor here, and not to have asked Edith to dance with you!”

“I did ask her several times.”

“Several! how many? You asked her once, when I was standing by, and I don’t believe you spoke to her again.”

“And if I did not, what difference does it make? She did not trouble about it.”

“Very likely not. It would be rather absurd for one person to trouble about another’s ill-humour. But, anyhow, she missed three dances because you did not ask her, and would have missed another if Lord Whatcombe had not said

he should not allow her to be a wall flower any longer."

"Missed them because Vrynné did not ask her. He was dancing with her all the while."

"That is not true, you know it is not. Mr. Vrynné danced with her but three times, and no wonder if it had been much oftener—you have heard they have been as it were brought up together. But if you had not been perfectly blind you would have seen that he was much more attentive to Miss Alice Popworth."

"Oh, yes, of course. A fellow is always blind because he won't be humbugged."

"Humbugged, Stuart! That is a most objectionable word at the best of times—it is very vulgar, and I wish you would not use it. You are a perfect noodle, that's the whole of it. I will write to mamma, and will tell papa—"

"What is that you will tell, papa?" asked Mr. Jardine coming through the laurels. "You are rather excited, Polly. I heard your voice twenty yards off."

"About Stuart's ill manners, papa. You must have observed his rudeness and cross temper last night."

"Yes, I did observe it, and was sorry to think Master Stuart was behaving so stupidly."

"I have been telling him the same, but he considers his conduct perfectly excellent and becoming. He is as obstinate as a—a—a—"

"A donkey, Polly" suggested her father.

"Just so, papa."

"But he is quite old enough to know his own mind, and if he loses the chance of getting a good wife he must blame no one but himself. We are keeping breakfast waiting—come on; perhaps this moody young gentleman will follow."

"I hope he won't, unless he is going to apologise to Edith."

Stuart did apologise, but it was in a half grumbling tone; and Edith consequently snubbed his advances most unmercifully. He told the result to his sister. "Served you right, too," was her annotation. The visit drew to an end. Mary Jardine and her father enjoyed themselves to the full. The two girls were inseparable. They had examined every corner of the Avondale grounds. They had ransacked the old hall and turned out its curiosities—the ancient armour, the piece of

the true cross which had been brought from Palestine, and which, when thrown by Fairfax into the fire could not be burnt, the two or three secret passages, the manor rolls, and other relics of the past. They had scanned the brasses and monuments in the little Saxon church at Avondale till Mary was as familiar with them as Edith.

They had gone to the giant oak on Tutcombe Hill, and 'neath its vast shade had mused over the time when the rough hewn stones around them were an altar on which human victims were burnt, and of which the Avondales mayhap were the high-priests. It was the last Wednesday. "You must forgive Stuart," pleaded Mary. "If you don't care for him, don't at least let him go without one kind word. He was so anxious to come here, and now it is nothing but his jealousy has made him behave so stupidly."

"But he has no right to be jealous," objected Edith. "I have not known him many weeks."

"I know that, but he has never been jealous about any one before."

"And he has much less reason to be stupid and unpolite."

"I know that, too, but he was not stupid or

unpolite in Scotland. Poor Stuart, his brain is half turned, I think."

"Poor fellow, he must be in a bad state. Well, what shall I give him? I will get a piece of this mistletoe—you know it is our emblem, and will remind him of Lyddonshire—and if he is good to-morrow at Mrs. Vyrnne's, I will give it him. He has been better the last two or three days."

Vyrnne had not troubled the waters since the preceding Saturday, perhaps this was partly the reason. On the Sunday they had attended service at Newbury Cathedral, with Jardine as their sole cavalier, and had had a very pleasant day. Altogether his prospects, so very gloomy a short week since, seemed to have taken a different appearance, and he was consequently highly elated, and in a much better humour.

"Yes, he has been so," replied Mary. "Our visit to the Cathedral last Sunday, and the fine day, has greatly improved him. But how shall we get the mistletoe?"

"There is a twig only a few feet above us."

This difficulty they solved by the aid of a long pole.

A croquet party at Mrs. Vrynné's followed the next day. Stuart had determined to shake off the demon that possessed him, and he succeeded remarkably well, and the more he succeeded the more it seemed to him that Vrynné's attentions were not exclusively devoted to Miss Avondale.

"How devoted Vrynné is to Miss Popworth," he remarked to Edith. "Quite her cavalier."

"Of course he is," she replied maliciously. "Charley is a capital fellow—always so polite and gentlemanly to every one."

Stuart's brow darkened, and he growled. "Oh, yes. Women always say that of any empty headed fellow who will chatter and talk to them."

"But Charley is not empty-headed; he has just taken an excellent degree, and will have a fellowship soon."

"Degrees and fellowships are no real tests of one's fitness for active life. They often make a man thoroughly conceited and affected. I am glad I did not get a good degree, though you need not have reminded me of it."

"I did not remind you of it, sir," she said sharply. "Charley is not conceited or affected. And I have no doubt he will show himself at

least as well fitted for the real business of life as those who spend years at cricket and billiards." Her cheek was flushed, then seeing how genuinely sorry Stuart seemed, she added—"But you must be quite blind. Charley's attentions to Alice Popworth are not dictated by politeness merely."

Stuart started. "Oh, Miss Avondale, is it so—is it the truth?"

"Better ask him," she said tartly.

He did not ask him; but he was very humble, and next morning, catching Edith in the library early, he apologised to her very sincerely. "I have been very thick-headed—"

But she would not allow him to go on,—
"Nothing of the kind, Mr. Jardine; you have made no mistake, you have only been excessively rude."

"Miss Avondale," he groaned, "I have been very rude, but I wish I had made a mistake, too. You will pardon me, I trust."

"An ill-mannered person has to ask pardon of himself chiefly."

"And won't you give me something as a keepsake—anything, however small. It is presumptuous of me to ask you, but I am so sad."

“ I dare say. I did intend to give you this piece of mistletoe,” pulling it out of her pocket.

“ Mary and I got it on Wednesday, but you don’t deserve it.”

“ I really have been thoroughly miserable, Miss Edith. I have, indeed.”

And then he expressed himself so very contrite, and begged her at least to excuse his unpoliteness, that she consented to this, and he followed up his success by taking the mistletoe from not unwilling hands.

The rest of the visit sped away quickly and pleasantly to all, doubly so to Stuart Jardine. He saw nothing of the Dawsons, who were on the Continent. Avondale he accompanied to most of the local meetings, in particular to a big dinner at Newbury, to celebrate some town improvements, whereat Avondale’s health, proposed by Sir Charles Popworth, with the hope that he would soon be member for the county, was drunk with an enthusiasm that augured well for his success, should he attempt to realise the hope.

BOOK IV.



CLARE CAMPION.

CLARE CAMPION.

CHAPTER I.

AT Egremont Towers again. Avondale's vacation had come to an end, though it was not yet the middle of October. He had spent a few days with the Earl of Wyversley in Nottinghamshire, but their pleasure had been marred by continued rain. The Countess had heard very much of him, from both Ravenshurst and the Wharfedales. The former had spoken rather disparagingly, deeming him to be an ambitious schemer plotting for his own ends, but the latter, from closer acquaintance and better knowledge, had formed a very different opinion; and the Countess, ere his visit was over, had come to a like favourable conclusion.

He was refreshed in body and mind. He had not forgotten Miss Dawson, but he had ceased to think of her—for the simple reason that she had

gone on the Continent instead of returning to Lyddonshire, and so had been absent from sight and memory, and that he had himself been fully occupied while at home. His sister, too, had been most careful to prevent any allusion being made to this lady, and, on the other hand, to awaken in her brother's breast an interest for Miss Vrynné. With her she kept up a constant correspondence, hearing from her at least twice a week, and sending her, in return, all the news of the neighbourhood. The letters she always tossed over to Walter, on the pretence that he would, of course, like to hear of the peregrinations of Mr. Vrynné, but in the hope that it would be those of Mr. Vrynné's daughter in which he would be chiefly concerned. She often spoke of him, but it was with the frankness of close and long-continued intimacy; and so Avondale himself thought—that is, as far as he thought at all about it.

He generally handed back the letters with the brief remark, "How they are enjoying themselves!" or, "What a beautiful place Lausanne, or Chillon, or Lugano, or Como is; we must go there next summer, Edith." "And they have seen

Lady Wharfedale and Wyversley ; I wish they had made each other's acquaintance;" and so on.

One passage struck him at the time—"I am so much obliged to you for the paper. I am sorry we have come away ; I should so like to have been at the ball. Walter is becoming quite a great man. We have been talking very much about him. Papa is highly pleased with his speech at the dinner, and hopes he will get into Parliament soon. I hope he will put up for the county some day. I am sure he would succeed, for he would have so many friends ; and it would be so nice."

As he read this, Avondale experienced a misty glimmering of what might be, but he had so long known the writer that it was only a shadow, which passed away even before he perceived it. All his thoughts were henceforth to be directed to the one cherished object—the formation of a political party. This, this alone, would, he fondly imagined, give him entire occupation, to the exclusion of every other subject.

Many have had a similar belief. They have asserted to others, and falsely pretended to be assured themselves, that ambition, glory, fame

can be the sole and final aim of all their labours. This they have asserted loudly and vociferously, and thus have stilled for the moment the cry of their nature, and have deadened the yearning of their soul, till the cry has risen again, changed into the cynic's sneer or the tyrant's menace, and the yearning that erst sought sympathy has been supplanted by the contempt of him who knows no fellows and discredits the very existence of goodness and mercy.

The human spirit is not single, but compound. It is a couple. Neither of its elements is perfect of itself; neither is completely developed. True enough that many a man—and, perhaps, though doubtful, some women—may pass through life without becoming aware of any deficiency, without thinking that anything is wanting to make up the full measure of their being.

Avondale had laboured under such a delusion till Miss Dawson's fickleness had awakened him. He was, as we know, at first very much pained at the sudden withdrawal of the support on which he had unconsciously leant; he had next been even more vexed at the blow inflicted on his own estimation of himself. But both sentiments

had, thanks to some weeks' residence with friends, entirely left him, and the slight scars were almost healed. He was restored to himself. He had learned by experience. He had before him a goal which would demand his utmost exertions. He had thus such ample employment for his brain as would allow no relaxation for less manly concerns.

He despised women ; or, at least, their littleness of intellect, their sentimentalism, their petty quarrels. So he told himself again and again. He had never been really in love, and never should be—he who had been brought up in seclusion, who had been a scholar among scholars and a man among men ! This was a postulate equally unimpeachable. And he was now once more at Egremont, to be continually mingling with women young, beautiful, witty—to be often in the company of Clare Campion—and he should not fall in love ; and politics would engage his sole attention. Just so.

CHAPTER II.

THE Towers filled rapidly after the return of the family. The grouse had been somewhat thinned in August, but there still remained not a few birds, while the covers were crowded with pheasants—too much so for real sport.

One of the earliest arrivals was FitzHenry.

“You are wonderfully improved in health,” he said to Avondale. “Ready for the Waterbridge Commission yet?”

“I believe so,” replied Avondale.

“That is more than the other side can say, then. I was down there the other day. I was staying at Calidaqua, and ran over to see Rosse and Taylor. It is a fine story they will have for Grim Growler and Co. If they prove half of it, we shall have something to enliven this dull season.”

“Enough to keep in full work the whole morality side of the ‘Times’ and ‘Morning Mercury.’”

“Yes; your committee are highly satisfied with the three Commissioners. Grim Growler’s reputation has, it seems, already preceded him, and the other side are quaking with dread of the wrath to come. One of the solicitors has levanted. Mr. Broadcloth is ailing, and has taken to his bed. He is terrified with the ghosts of a certain document in Mr. Rosse’s possession. The whole place is as alarmed as though the French or the cholera were bearing down upon them. They are learning off their respective parts by rote; and I should not be surprised if some of them were hatching some plot against yourself. I hope you will be prepared.”

“Are not Starrett and Percy Mulgrave compromised?” asked Wharfedale. “I have heard ugly rumours about perjury, and so forth, before the committee. I sincerely hope, for Mulgrave’s sake, they are not true.”

“There are rumours, and something more than that, according to what Rosse told me. Johnson held them both innocent of personal bribery. I believe Avondale’s committee will bring home personal bribery to Starrett—at least, they have very strong proofs. In case of Mul-

grave, it is different. He, probably, did not bribe personally ; but he so trusted his lawyers and agents, he so entirely put himself into the hands of his committee, and he mingled so much with the voters that his acts, and those of his chief adherents, will be confused, and he may be condemned for what he is innocent of."

"It will be a source of the greatest vexation to the Ministry before it is settled," said the Marquis. "Maitland must almost wish he had left Mulgrave at the Foreign Office."

"I should think so," said Avondale. "Then Sloe's performances lately can be scarcely more to his liking. They have been amusing from their very bumptiousness. Did you read his speech to his loving constituents and subjects at the annual meeting of the Shodditon and Diddleham Amalgamated Society of Short Weights and Never-give-trust? How he said his colleagues formed the bony skeleton, necessary as a framework, but utterly unable to exert itself, to which he and his principles gave flesh, and life, and vigour?"

"Rather taller talk than one would have given even him credit for. On the same occasion he let out

strongly against our foreign policy, and gave a rather decided opinion of Bayswater's abilities. I met the Duke at Venice. He was very savage, and it required but little rubbing to get him into a towering rage."

"It was really ungrateful of Sloe," said Fitz-Henry. "Bayswater has already apologised twice in the Lords for his Radical colleague's escapades."

"So he complained; and he declared he would have put that duty on me if I had remained with them."

"Besides," continued Avondale, "Bayswater is getting along very tolerably with America. If he has not yet settled the quarrel, he has, at least, given it a much better form than it had when Garmouth left the Foreign Office for the Premiership."

"How about Exmoor?" asked Fitz-Henry. "You had him here in August."

"Cannot say. I tried him, but he won't desert yet. I imagine, however, Sole's indiscretion will disgust him considerably. He will be here in a fortnight or so. The Duke of Strathclyde will come at the beginning of next week,

and if we get him, we can get Exmoor and his family next. I shall have a grand durbar to flatter Strathclyde's pomp, and, when we have put the whole affair well in train, I shall hand him over to you, Avondale."

"Thanks, but I fear I shall not do justice to your intention. I think, however, the affair is already well in train—to use your own words. You know that Bayndon makes the Admiralty his hobby, and the waste there his pet grievance; that, in fact, he wants to be first lord; his speeches all tend to that direction, and I fancy Maitland does not discourage him, and Sloe, his dear friend. Since the close of the Session he has been riding his horse on several occasions; he was at Shodditon with his brother-in-law, Sloe, and they buttered each other amazingly. I met him just after at Wyversley, and congratulated him on his exertions. I praised his patriotism. I got him a whole day by myself on Langbury Common—agreed that the expenditure was enormous, and ought to be curtailed; hinted that it wanted a person of his breadth of mind to take charge of the department, and ventured to surmise that probably Mr. Jardine would be glad

to give his active support to the Ministry, if he saw they were really on a course of retrenchment. He was delighted with my remarks. I made good use of the opportunity, and had persuaded him, before the day was over, that he was the individual destined by Providence for the salvation of England. He went from Wyversley to Maitland's. Next Saturday he meets his constituents at Grantham, to account for his proceedings during the late Session—all those Rads do that, considering it as a part of their duty—and I shall be greatly surprised if his grandiloquence does not lead to the resignation of Exmoor. The more so, as that cad, Muddler, who is Exmoor's especial abomination, is the second member for the borough. The two together, let them once begin preaching less expenditure, will make a nice hash of it before they conclude."

"Well, FitzHenry," said the Marquis, with a smile, when Avondale had finished, "what do you think of this new proof of Avondale's diplomacy?" And, then, without waiting for an answer, he added—"By the by, there's Pilgrim; have you heard anything of him?"

“Yes ; I met him at Biarritz. He came the day before we left ; we went on through the North of Spain to Corunna. I saw him but for a few minutes in the evening. He was terribly tacit on political matters—not over-much pleased with his associates, I think.”

“We must get him here before Christmas. It is absolutely necessary to withdraw him from the Government. Can you not devise some plan, Avondale?”

“We must trust in the fates and Maitland’s perversity,” said Avondale. “Church and State is the shoal on which the Ministerial vessel will stick, if it not altogether become stranded. To lighten it and get afloat again, some of the heavier passengers must be thrown overboard—if, indeed, they have not previously, on first catching sight of the light-house’s warning glare, abandoned it, and taken refuge in the nearest friendly craft. Sir Edward Pilgrim will be one, Herbert Williams another, Sir George Edmunds a third of these.”

“You hit the exact men,” said FitzHenry. “You may add that Rowe and Kelley are certain to split on the Budget, and that Tintern won’t

serve long under Blocke Head. The first time the latter lets off a man who has committed only two murders, because his great grandmother was once at an execution, and, therefore, her descendants to all generations may be tainted with a mania for crime; while he makes a half-starved woman blessed with half-a-dozen hungry children and a drunken brute of a husband, serve out her three months for stealing five small potatoes, value one penny—the first time this happens Lord Tintern will bid the Home Office adieu.”

“So I should imagine,” said Wharfedale, laughing. “Well, Avondale, there is your work cut out for you. FitzHenry and myself and Jardine will perform our share of it, but it is on your shoulders that much of the really laborious and irksome part of the enterprise will fall. You must attend to the minutiae, must look after the trivial, though highly important matters of detail; must devote yourself to smoothing the roads, and clearing away difficulties so that we can perform our evolutions unimpeded.”

“How do you relish the prospect, Avondale?”

asked Fitz Henry, with a smile. "The Marquis is putting it pretty plainly before you."

"Very much—*experientia docet*," replied Avondale. "I presume that you yourself spent many a long hour under the bar over wearisome reports and cases, and in drawing and redrawing declarations which were summarily obliterated by the man whom you read as bad."

"I believe so; and you may add that when called I still found for several years plenty of vacant time to do the same."

"It is the same with most men," said Wharfedale. "The more brilliant their success in middle-age, the more unremitting were their exertions in youth. But, apart from this and the service it may be to Avondale to have occupation which will develop and strengthen his character, some one must act as manager, secretary, superintendent, or whatever he may be called—some one must have *carte blanche* to enter into engagements on behalf of the others. It is utterly out of the question, FitzHenry, that you could take such responsibility. My time will be scarcely less occupied than your own. I suppose the decisive struggle will come off before

Easter; till then my guests will demand all my attentions. Jardine, of course, will have no more leisure. He must have a vast deal to do with his scattered estates alone; if he is to render adequate assistance, his other spare moments will be completely filled up with preparing materials for an attack on the Colonial Administration of the Government—this, of course, will be his special department.”

“You forget,” said Avondale, “that Wyversley will be of some service.”

“I trust he may,” replied the Marquis, “but you will have to revolutionise him first—rather a difficult operation, I fear. However, Exmoor will, if we can detach him, be your *alter ego*. But, come, our confab has lasted long enough. The visitors will be enquiring for us directly.”

CHAPTER III.

“REGINALD is decidedly changing,” said the Marchioness one day to her husband. “I went into his sitting-room this morning. He had ‘Hallam’ and ‘May’ on the table, and a heap of memoranda lying by. See, here is a list of Ministries during the last century. Where could he have obtained it?”

“I have no idea; I should not myself know where to find them, unless in some series of almanacks or something of the kind. I have noticed that he is changing, or, at least, fancied so. Avondale, I suppose, is the cause. That young man must to a certainty become famous. He has capacity far beyond the common, and, what is better than all the bosh about genius, a vast amount of pluck, perseverance, energy?”

“Just the three points in which most of the young men of the times are wanting. Look at Talbot, Stansville, Brayclift—all too indolent to

make any use of the opportunities showered upon them."

"The first two are dolts, or rather cowards, unfitted for this life. Is not that the case, Fitz-Henry?" he asked of the lawyer, who, with Ravenshurst, that moment entered the room.

"Who are unfitted for this life?" asked Fitz-Henry.

"Stansville and Talbot—the younger son I mean, who will come into his mother's property, the elder brother is in Parliament—dolts as well as cowards."

"They are wasting their time and opportunities most unwisely, but just now that is rather a prevalent spectacle. Pity something could not be done to raise the younger men, especially those of good family, out of their listlessness."

"The greatest pity. All real energy and activity seem to be knocked out of them. They are totally unlike their *confrères* of half a century back, who, if they now and again indulged in excess and dissipation, yet atoned in great measure for their follies by the zeal with which they threw themselves into politics. Now they dawdle out their existence in inanity, pure and

simple, save when one of them, like Brayclift, goes to the bad, and then he does it openly and unblushingly."

"The man who acts like Brayclift in the present day," said FitzHenry, "is a perfect idiot. There was some excuse for such conduct at the time you have just mentioned, at the beginning of this century, but there is none now. There was then little scope for the outburst of exuberant spirits. If a man did not take to politics, there was nought before him but enforced idleness. But all has changed. The exigencies of our life give room for all to make themselves useful. And were it otherwise, Australia, the Cape, New Zealand are as near as America was under George III."

"I can't understand it," said the Marquis. "The younger sons and the offshoots of good families have every opportunity offered them of acquiring reputation, and yet they calmly relinquish their chances and allow others of lower social rank to pull to the fore. The drawing-room and the club-house bound their existence. Not one in twenty has a tithe of Avondale's zeal and determination."

"Pardon my interrupting you," said Ravenshurst. "I agree with most of your observations, but I really object to your holding up Avondale as a model. You see his good points—I, perhaps, only his bad ones. He seems to be a great deal too self-satisfied and too consequential."

"I fear you scan him rather too narrowly."

"I hope not. And are you not admitting him to too great freedom? He is, if not a mere nobody, yet a man of broken fortune, and common sense would say he is most likely intriguing for his own ends."

"You don't do him justice, Lord Ravenshurst. He is not of broken fortune," objected the Marchioness.

"Decidedly not," said her husband. "He has been asked to put up for his own county at the next election, and Whatcombe, the Lord Lieutenant, has promised to support him."

"Is that really the case?" doubted Ravenshurst.

"Of course it is," replied the Marquis. "You would scarcely question Avondale's word."

"And he is not intriguing for his own ends," added the Marchioness. "Some one has been

telling you much that is false, for I am sure you could not have thought such an idea yourself. I should not be surprised if it were Killarney; I hate Killarney."

"Fortunate Killarney!" ejaculated FitzHenry. "He has got rid of Kate Vandeleur, and is going to marry a girl whom he has not known six months, and who before was half engaged to Mr. Avondale."

"A mistake on Avondale's part."

"You are really predisposed against him, Ravenshurst," said the Marquis. "Here is one, at least, who is his sworn ally," as his son Henry opened the door.

"Oh, mamma!" he shouted, "I have jumped the wharf and Mr. Avondale has jumped the Dead Man's Gully. Oh, so grand! And no one else would follow."

"What is that you're saying, Master Henry?" asked his father.

"Mr. Avondale has leaped the Dead Man's Gully. Mr. Avondale and Mr. Hubert Digby and Lord Brayclift were riding along one side and Jessie Frescheville the other, and the others were some distance behind. Jessie's hat blew

off, and she asked them to come across and fetch it for her. Mr. Avondale said, 'You lead, Digby—you always like to go ahead—and we will follow;' but Digby wouldn't. So Mr. Avondale said, 'Come on, Brayclift—you will, of course, go to aid a lady;' and he touched the horse with the spur, held his head well up, and leaped over. The others had galloped up, and several of the ladies screamed; but he was all right, and he got Jessie's hat, and she gave him the rose she was wearing—yes, she did, mamma—but none of the others would follow. Oh! it was so fine to see him in the air; and such a wide place."

"'Tis wide, by Jove!" said Wharfedale. "What do you think of that, Ravenshurst. Would you care to attempt such a feat? It is twenty clear feet, and you must rise well back and land on firm land, or you would assuredly roll into the gully. What horse was he riding, Henry?"

"The roan, papa, that always stays in the stable by the pigeon's house—'Sir Henri' you call it, papa."

“Sir Henri!” exclaimed Lady Wharfedale, with a little scream.

“That’s improving matters,” said the Marquis. “There is not a groom in my establishment will venture to mount that beast since he pitched Cook over his head. We call him Sir Henri because he is untameable. Come, Ravenshurst, confess that our young friend who rides so well is more of a gentleman than you have given him credit for.”

“Ravenshurst will acknowledge it before the close of next year,” said FitzHenry, “unless I am much mistaken. I myself most willingly avow that I have the very highest opinion of Mr. Avondale.”

“So have I,” said the Marquis. “I suppose we must end our debate by preparing for dinner.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE Honble. Hubert Digby, mentioned above, was a brother of Lord Woburn, also now staying at the Towers. He was one of those strange phenomena, an aristocratic Radical. He was about thirty, and had been for the last half-a-dozen years anxiously seeking a seat in Parliament, but as yet without success. His views had gradually developed into their present maturity. He was great on educational topics, and considered that the Universities should be thrown open without restraint of any kind; and to convince all the world of the soundness of his convictions, he had recently resigned a fellowship at Oxford, though some asserted that as his approaching marriage with a sister-in-law of Mordaunt Tracey, the younger daughter of Mr. Strickland, would necessitate this step, he had chosen, while time remained, to make capital out of it. He and Avondale were not on good terms; he was jealous

of Avondale for the influence which the latter manifestly possessed amongst the Wharfedale set, and Avondale returned the jealousy with contempt for his pretensions.

Lady Jessie Frescheville was the eldest daughter of Earl Frescheville. The Earl was a Whig of the real type—grand, haughty, slightly pompous, not altogether without brains. He was visiting—if the progresses of such an elevated being may be so spoken of—the Wharfedales. He had large possessions, and, as these lay very aptly around many small boroughs, his political influence was more than proportionate to his wealth. Consequently, the Marquis was very desirous to secure his support, but the necessary labour of listening to his dullness, and of persuading him that his prolixity was the essence of wisdom, was even more than Avondale had arranged for, and he sought a more agreeable, though more dangerous, mode of accomplishing his project, by paying unremitting attention to the Lady Jessie. She was the best of the five who formed the family. She had little of her mother's hauteur, and none of her father's pomposity; was witty, vivacious, fairly accomplished,

and received, as a matter of course, the homage paid her by many of the visitors. Digby was quite as attentive as Avondale. He was great on heroism, and noble deeds. That morning he had been complaining of the decline of chivalry—

“It has died out, and left no principle to supply its place. Its decay has been the sundering of a bond that knit together rich and poor. Don’t you think so?”

“Yes—it is very like it. All the young men of the present day are so very selfish. They look after themselves only, and leave us poor women to our own resources. Why, if I were to tumble into the lake,”—they were walking round it—“not one of you would jump in after me.”

There were vehement asseverations to the contrary.

“What does Mr. Avondale say?” she asked. “His candour will compel him to give his exact sentiments.”

“I? I can, unfortunately, swim, so I presume I should follow the other knights-errant. Otherwise, I should certainly get a long pole, or something of the kind, and extend it to you.”

A chorus of disapprobation arose—"What shall be done to him?"

But Lady Campion objected—"You know it's the exact truth, Jessie. Not one of these loud voiced gallants would fish out either of us, if he risked his own precious existence in the doing of it."

"Thanks, Lady Campion," said Avondale. "May you never fall in, and put any one's heroism to the test. But has chivalry died out? Are there no knights-errant now, who go wandering over the world to find out demons and giants, and enchanted lands? Sturt and Wills in Australia, Livingstone, Speke, and Grant, in Africa—what are they? Even the brute chivalry that is tested by merely the power to face death exists as of yore—Massey, fresh from school, climbing the walls of the Redan; the six hundred riding gaily to destruction, in obedience to orders, though some one had blundered; Wilkinson stopping at Delhi, to fire the powder magazine, Stuart winning the spurs of gold that Du Guesclin would have been proud to wear; Stonewall Jackson and Henry Havelock each marching, the one with barefoot troops, the other under a torrid

sun, 350 miles in a single fortnight, and fighting three battles the while; Parkin Jeffcock remaining in the Oaks Colliery, even while the grip of death was on his throat, in order that others might escape—will you match these in past ages?"

"Well said Avondale," exclaimed Wharton, "bless me, if you don't very often hit the truth."

"And," continued Avondale, "Mr. Digby is really too modest when he asserts that chivalry has vanished. He not only gets married—a very chivalrous proceeding, as the ladies will admit—but he actually gives up his fellowship previously, a still more chivalrous action, considering the worship now paid to mammon."

There was a slight titter, and Digby experienced the pleasant sensation a man always experiences when he is in doubt whether to punch his adversary's head, or shake his hand. However, Lady Jessie, in order to keep him in good humour, took his side, and, after lunch, she selected him as her cavalier. The whole party, eight to ten, went down the vale. Lady Jessie crossed the stream, on pretence of seeing something, but told the others not to follow, as she would recross

directly. As she came opposite the gully, her hat, rather unaccountably, fell off, and Avondale, as mentioned, recaptured it for her. She thenceforward snubbed Digby, and she accepted Avondale's arm to the dining-room.

"What a silly man you are," she said, "to risk your life for a woman's whim?"

"I hope I shall never be guilty of a greater piece of folly. Who risks nothing wins nothing?"

"What have you won to-day, sir?"

"A little flower," pointing to the rose.

"You are not really wearing that now. I gave it you merely—"

"Merely to plague Digby—poor fellow! But it is scarcely complimentary to me either."

"I did not mean that. You are wretchedly perverse. Were you so devoid of comprehension when you were canvassing at Waterbridge?"

"Canvassing at Waterbridge, Lady Jessie! You surely do not trouble anything about elections."

"But I do though, a great deal. And I know Lady Thanet—she is very indignant because your side did not give her husband fair play; but he

is to have a peerage as soon as the bother is over—it comes on again soon, when is it?”

“A peerage—this is news,” thought Avondale; then aloud—“The enquiry has begun this week. If you are so interested in parliamentary matters, I am surprised the Earl does not take some position in the Government. The present Ministry would be very glad to secure his support, I imagine.”

“I dare say they would; I believe Mr. Maitland has spoken to papa, or at least the Duke of Bayswater has for him—you know the Duke is Minister for Foreign Affairs. But papa does not care about politics; he says it is too much bother.”

“Ah, I should imagine the Earl would be disgusted with the incessant labour that a seat in the Cabinet involves. But he might take one of the less onerous, and more dignified posts, about the household.”

“He might do so, but those are all filled up, and, I dare say, the Government would not venture to quarrel with one of their own party, even to make certain of papa’s support.”

“Perhaps not. But they might raise him to a higher dignity?”

“He would not refuse that; and, I believe, Bayswater hinted something of the kind.”

“Thank you,” thought Avondale, and there-upon having acquired all the information he was likely to learn, he turned the conversation—

“Rather a rush of visitors next week,” he said.

“Yes,” replied his companion, “and such grand people we inferior stars shall be completely overlooked. The Duke of Strathclyde—he is such a nice man, have you seen him yet? Prince Carvada—I don’t like him at all. Perhaps the Duke of Hants, Lady Wharfedale’s father, but he is old, and not in good health. But her nephew, the Marquis of Stonehenge—you know her only brother is dead—will certainly come. He is so lively and manly, about seventeen, and has only just left Eton.”

“We shall be quite overwhelmed, that is such individuals as myself—and Digby too, spite of his chivalry—but you, Lady Jessie, will be the dazzling light round which many unfortunate moths will flutter, and,”—as they rose for the ladies to withdraw—“get their wings burnt, too.”

A slight bend in acknowledgment, and a smile, and she was gone.

“Mr. Avondale,” said the Marchioness, when she had an opportunity of speaking to him in the drawing-room—“You must not fall in love with Lady Jessie. Young men should never fall in love—it either ruins their prospects, or it prevents them attending properly to their legitimate occupations. And you must not, like some hero of romance, ride fiery horses, and vault tremendous chasms. And you must not quarrel with Mr. Digby. I heard you were so smart—is not that the term?—towards him this morning as to be really rude; yet he will be in Parliament first. And you must conciliate Lord Ravenshurst—he is inclined to think you an intriguant. And you must look after Reginald well—his mother will be so grateful; you have already made a favourable impression on her. And now go over and talk to Lady Frescheville.”

CHAPTER V.

AVONDALE crossed the room. Digby was paying assiduous court to Lady Frescheville ; so he seated himself by Lady Campion.

“Truant,” she said, “where have you been ?
I am like Una—

‘Forsaken, woeful, solitary maid.’

You have been here now nearly a fortnight, and have scarcely deigned to speak to me.”

“My dear Lady Campion, how can you say so ? When not engaged with the Marquis I have been your most devoted servant. But you have snubbed my assiduity several times, and selected that fellow Digby as your cavalier instead.”

“But then you know he is going to be married, and consequently is the most discreet attendant one could have. Ladies always prefer engaged men ; there is an indefinable—what shall I call

it—charm about them, which makes their company so very attractive.”

“An indefinable charm about engaged men! Dear me—I should have thought them an anomalous species of animal, something like the bat that flitters between earth and air, or the chrysalis that is neither a useful silkworm, like myself, for example—”

“Impudent!”

“Nor a gaudy butterfly that hovers the day-long in the full sunshine, the admired of all observers, and sips the honey from every flower, like *cari sposi* generally, and Sir Vivian Langbois, in particular, who has as yet only three divorce cases on hand for the next term.”

“It is only two, sir.”

“I beg your pardon. It would have been three, but he called on Wallace, and threatened to horsewhip him if he, the husband, any more slandered her, the wife’s, character; and the wife added thereto—the *chère* Isabella, she is a nice darling—unimaginable tortures of her own private devising. So the husband backed out of the case, and in order to give the lie direct to all reports, he has allowed Isabella and Sir Vivian to

go together to Homburg and Wiesbaden, and on to Venice, where the Marquis met them, while he himself, charming man, has penitently followed after three days' interval."

"Mr. Avondale, you are a frightful scandal-monger; you are exaggerating everything terribly."

"Not a bit of it; therefore I don't think I shall marry directly. But I will get engaged if you think it—what was it you called it?—so inimitably charming."

"I would—it would add to your numerous exploits."

"But I know no one; will you point but some one who will have pity on my forlorn condition?"

"Jessie Frescheville."

"Jessie Frescheville? why the thought would be the death of the Earl. But even she will not refuse my escort so pointedly as you did yesterday, when you coolly asked Digby to assist you into the saddle, though I had already volunteered my aid."

"I should scarcely think she would, after your exploit of this morning—such a feat would have

stormed any lady's heart ; and you have her rose now, preserve it carefully."

" I ought to do so—it's the only flower I have had given me for so long—you are wearing quite a bouquet, yet I dare say you won't spare me even one."

" I would if you asked properly, the whole bouquet, and weave them into a crown for you. Here's Wyversley coming to eject you. It was fortunate you were riding Sir Henri this morning—was it not, Reginald?"

" What—about that leap? Yes, by Jove it was grand, but slightly foolhardy, if I may say so, Walter."

" A narrow escape of breaking your neck, Mr. Avondale," added Lady Campion.

" Not much narrower than I had yesterday. I was so annoyed at seeing Digby trot off so conceitedly with you that, when we came to Barden Gorge, where Digby was a few yards ahead, and there was room for only a single file, I was greatly tempted to let Sir Henri take the bit in his mouth and bolt. He would have smashed up Digby in fine style."

" And yourself, too," said Lady Campion. " I

thought you were free from such aberrations of feeling, and that your giant intellect did not permit you to be harassed by the petty annoyances that disturb the serenity of other people's lives."

Avondale stood up. "How ought I, Wyversley, suitably to acknowledge such a tribute—or such an insinuation?"

"Yes, you ought to be off," said Lady Campion. "You have been talking to me too long. Yesterday I took Mr. Digby, in order to compel you to attend to Lady Frescheville, and now you certainly must not neglect her or the Earl, if you intend to involve him in your political net."

"I have come to tell him the same, Lady Campion; if you can dispense with his company, that is," said Wyversley. "You needn't look so glum, Walter. The Marchioness has sent me with the message. I have been listening to the Earl's harangue for some time, so that I have taken my share of the disagreeable part of the work, and FitzHenry is with him now, looking awfully bored; you certainly must relieve guard."

CHAPTER VI.

AVONDALE walked off with a somewhat rueful countenance.

“FitzHenry, if his lordship could excuse you,” he said, “Lady Campion would be glad of your assistance to make up a rubber.”

“I fear Lady Campion must remain without my aid,” replied the lawyer. “I am in the midst of an interesting argument with the Earl—”

“Don’t mention it, sir,” interposed the Earl very graciously; “when a lady calls, all other engagements give way.”

“Perhaps I can supply Mr. FitzHenry’s place,” said Walter, “as a listener, I mean; not as a disputant. I have no argumentative skill, and if I had, your lordship’s unequalled reasoning powers and acumen would overwhelm me.”

He took the seat FitzHenry had gladly vacated. The Earl smiled with extreme condescension

“Your modesty compels you to take too low an estimate of your abilities, Mr. Avondale. I have heard much of you, and I seldom hear of any but persons of mark, and if I do I never remember their names.”

“Your lordship is far too flattering to myself. I am not surprised that you should forget the names of many who come under your notice. In the present state of society so many causes concur to give an undue prominence to a multitude of little men who but a century ago would not have been known out of their own restricted circle.”

“Just what I have been saying to Mr. Fitz-Henry, but he does not altogether agree with me. I am highly pleased that your views are so nearly in accord with mine.”

“Now a meeting of Railway Shareholders, or of some Joint Stock Company on the verge of bankruptcy is placarded far and wide; while the petty squabbles of every miserable vestry, and the jangling and personal abuse of the half-a-dozen pousy councilmen of any tenth-rate borough attract almost as much interest as the Sessions of Parliament.”

“Just what I have been saying.”

“This is not as it ought to be. Mayors and Corporations are doubtless all very good in their way. Aldermen and town beadles are, of course, very estimable men, very estimable and perfect as far as Providence intended them, for though there may be many varieties of human nature, distinct and separate from each other by unmistakable signs, yet, as we learn that everything is good, we may fairly assume that each variety has its full measure of perfection.”

“Precisely so, Mr. Avondale, you are a genius. That is what I wished to make FitzHenry understand; but either my talent for exposition is very poor or his faculty of comprehension is not highly developed.”

“The latter, probably, my lord; or rather his great abilities—”

“They are great, Mr. Avondale.”

“—may, perhaps, be somewhat warped by his profession. A barrister is so accustomed to maintaining one side of a question that even in common matters he is seldom able to consider the topic dispassionately, and to give due weight to his opponent’s arguments.”

“That must be it, Mr. Avondale. I was astonished at FitzHenry’s obtuseness ; yet I was certain my views were correct. They are a part of my nature, my mental nature, and must, I believe, have been born with me, for I cannot remember the time when I had them not. From earliest childhood I have felt that there was a radical difference between the various classes of the body politic. The physical conformation of all men may be the same, though this is very questionable, anatomists and doctors are far from being agreed on this point, and to my mind, at least, there is a vast distinction between a thick-lipped negro, a tawny Mongolian, and a white skinned European ; but this apart, and taking the samerace—our own, for instance—are a nobleman, and a farm labourer, a Minister of State and a chimney-sweep, filled with the same aims and aspirations ? Of course their actual occupations are totally diverse, but would that alone make their inmost longings to be equally diverse, if there were not some other all-powerful, ever-present influence that directs into dissimilar grooves the nerve-currents—that is the new term—of each ? There must be some predisposing

cause, a cause internal not external, a cause which is an essential portion of us, for nothing less could modify the being, the actual being, the soul and spirit of humanity.”

“Yet, my lord, it is these lower insignificant atoms of society which would direct the whole—the people whose thoughts do not extend beyond the morrow, whose aspirations are limited to the getting an existence from day to day, whose keenest pleasures are the gross satisfaction of mere bodily cravings—it is these, these, my lord, who would hamper and control the views of the mighty geniuses whose ken has pierced adown the course of time to its farthest limits, and caught a glimpse faint, though distant, of the wonders that are in store for posterity.”

“You speak eloquently, Mr. Avondale. But you must not forget that whatever we may think of such presumption, not a few of those who style themselves statesmen favour—with a view to their own especial glorification, I grant—the spread and growth of such doctrines.”

“Your lordship would not be one of such favourers?”

“I? God forbid. I have avoided politics,

because, as a private individual, my concerns are even more than I can properly discharge, and had I paid any attention to State affairs, I must, of course, have been a prominent leader."

"But, even your privacy is much more public than many men's publicity. Your position places you, willingly or unwillingly, in the full glare of the light that radiates from the throne and makes your passive support to be eagerly sought after by Liberal and Tory alike."

"Of course, Mr. Avondale. That is an inevitable result of greatness. A person in my position cannot altogether withdraw himself from the affairs of the nation of which he is so important a fragment."

"I have heard"—this was a random shot of our hero's—"that the Earl of Garmouth was extremely anxious to secure your lordship's countenance, that he, in fact, desired you to select any post in the household which you should deem most suited to your worth."

"Did you really hear so?" said the Earl rather vivaciously. "You must possess wonderful sources of information; it was to be a perfect secret, because the Duke of Damnonia was

jealous of my influence, and had demanded the office himself. It was the post of Seneschal at Windsor Castle, but you know the authority of that officer extends over all the Royal armouries, and over the household troops wherever stationed. On this latter head there have been several quarrels between the Seneschal and the Commander-in-Chief as to their relative jurisdiction, and, therefore, when I declined the appointment it was conferred on the latter, and the same session an Act was passed directing that in future the same officer should fill both."

"So I remember. I was not aware of the immediate origin of that Act, as my information did not state the exact post offered to your lordship. I suppose Mr. Maitland has renewed the attempt made by Garmouth?"

"Yes; he and the Duke of Bayswater have been worrying me unceasingly."

"I am surprised at the Duke remaining a member of Maitland's Cabinet. Maitland's views are so thoroughly those whose tendency you have been so justly deploring."

"They are, Mr. Avondale; at least, I fear so."

"They can scarcely be otherwise, seeing that

he himself springs from the classes whose pretensions he embodies. It will be a sad misfortune for this country if it is to be abandoned to his guidance for any lengthened period."

"It will be, Mr. Avondale. Yet Maitland is gifted with powers of persuasion, and two or three of my brother peers are yielding almost implicitly to him."

"But could not something be done to put an end to the present state of affairs? Maitland's personal following in the Lower House cannot be large. He is Premier simply and solely because no one else lays claim to that station; because those opposed to him are mistrustful of each other. Were some one of moderate views to put himself forward, he would most certainly obtain the support of those Liberals who are of your lordship's style of thinking, and of those Tories who do not stubbornly resist any change and innovation."

"That may be, but who would be an eligible leader for such a purpose?"

"I scarcely know. Your lordship, of course, would not burden yourself with such a task, but perhaps you would not hesitate to support a

well-qualified nobleman who possessed the necessary tact and discretion and standing in society."

"I do not think I should refuse him my aid—indeed, I might be inclined to render him active help, that is as far as my many occupations permitted me the leisure. I consider that the Premier ought to be a Peer. But whom would you suggest? Damnonia I could not serve with; Bayswater is too closely leagued with the present Ministry to turn round upon it; the Earl of Cotteswold is a promising young man, but too much connected with the Tories; the Duke of Lincoln is in many respects well suited, but is, perhaps, too young, and has not had experience enough."

"Our host—the Marquis of Wharfedale."

"Ah, I forgot him altogether. But what are his ideas on the subject?" added the Earl, half suspiciously.

"At first sight," said Avondale, avoiding a direct answer, "one would say he is like your self, weary of politics. He has so recently resigned office."

"So he has—I forgot that too. You are a capital remembrancer, Mr. Avondale. Let's give

him a hint on the matter. Where is he? Oh, talking to the Countess."

He caught Wharfedale's eye, gave a slight nod, and the Marquis walked across to him.

"Frescheville," he said, "I fear Mr. Avondale has been boring you. The ladies are most anxious you should join them."

"Not in the least—he is a most delightful companion—quite a diplomatist. And what do you think? He has been hinting that you and I should put ourselves at the head of a party sworn to upset the present Cabinet."

"What! Mr. Avondale a politician! I thought he was merely a ladies' man—a drawing-room cavalier."

"He is not, though—he has very deep views on matters of State and politics."

"I am glad you say so. But business tomorrow. The ladies have been complaining this half hour of your want of gallantry in so entirely neglecting them."

CHAPTER VII.

LADY LUCY DE BREAUTE arrived that afternoon, in company with Sir Marmaduke and Lady Acton. "You must be most attentive to her," whispered the Marchioness to Avondale, in the drawing-room before dinner. "She has great influence with the Duke—you know she is his only child by his first wife. And besides, I may tell you a secret—Lord Exmoor is unmarried; his father does not wish him to remain unmarried any longer."

Nevertheless, Avondale after dinner betook himself in preference to Lady Jessie, for he was desirous to learn what had been the tenour of Digby's conversation in the morning, that gentleman even now devoting himself unremittingly to the Earl and Countess.

But the Lady Jessie was very distant, and supremely nonchalant. The walk had been delightful and the weather fine—she knew nothing

about politics—the vale of the Wharfe was, doubtless, very beautiful—yes, Mr. FitzHenry was a splendid speaker—she did not care about Ritualists—and, and, and, then there came a prolonged yawn.

Now, a yawn at the best of times is most unkind. Even if you have been pestered till past endurance with a bore, it is too harsh to yawn at him ; you may, if you choose, ring the bell for the servant to show him the door, and indeed, in case of absolute necessity, you may proceed to kick him out ; but one should never yawn—it tells your neighbour so very plainly that you are tired of him, his conversation, his presence, and that you not only consider him a humbug, and may be a knave, but also an inane, empty headed one. But a thousand times more unkind is it for a lady to yawn at an admirer, who is striving to win her good will—it is the refinement of cruelty, the quintessence of scorn.

Avondale was greatly annoyed at the lady's indifference, real or assumed, and Digby coming with a most satisfied air directly after to address her, he yielded her to that admirer, vowing to make the said admirer atone for the slight.

He rose, and crossing the room, met Wyversley “Something wrong, Walter?” inquired the latter. “Digby ejected you from Jessie Frescheville’s good books? I thought it very likely this afternoon when we—Digby, Frescheville, myself, with the ladies—wandered to the Priory. Digby stuck to the Earl, and it struck me he was trying to undo your work in that quarter. Cannot one of us punch his head, or do something of the kind? But for the moment this is impossible, so, perhaps, you had better go and have a chat with Lady de Breaute. I heard the Marchioness tell you to attend to her.”

Avondale obeyed the speaker, and took a seat by the lady’s side. She had not yet spoken to him, so she condescended so far as to express her pleasure at meeting him again. “You have been to Scotland, Wyversley tells me—how did you like it?”

“Very much indeed. I have always liked it, but this time I saw scarcely anything of the country—only Loch Lomond and Stirling, and the intervening parts.”

“You know Edinburgh?”

“Yes, though I fear I cannot be so enraptured

over it as most Scotch people expect their visitors to be."

"But you surely cannot deny that it is a very fine city, the finest, indeed, in Great Britain—what other have we like it?"

"If you really ask my private opinion, and will excuse my giving it, I must say that Bath is in every way worthy of a comparison with Edinburgh. From the high hill running down into Bath on the south—Holloway and Odd Down it is called—you get as fair a view as you do from Arthur's Seat, or the Calton."

"Are you acquainted with Bath? I know it well—it is a beautiful city—but do you consider it is quite as lovely as Edinburgh?"

"Every bit, Lady de Breaute. Standing on the hill I have mentioned, you have before you the whole of the Queen of the West—you can see all the streets, the Royal Crescent, the Parks, the Abbey, the Guildhall—Lansdowne forms a grand and unapproachable back ground—and to the east are the romantic dells of Combhay and Limpley Stoke."

"Bath is very beautiful, but I still prefer Edinburgh."

“And the Cannon Gate to Milsom Street?”

“Oh, Mr. Avondale, you are quite ungallant to attempt to drive me into a corner. You ought to know, sir, a lady may have any opinion she likes, and the more absurd it is so the more pertinaciously she will keep to it.”

“There’s an avowal for you, Walter,” said Wyversley, laughing. “You had better make a note of it.”

“And a charge against me, too—how am I to purge myself of it?”

“By bringing that portfolio,” she replied. “I like to see prints and paintings of every kind.” “Thank you,” as Avondale fetched the portfolio, which he opened, and he and Wyversley held between them, while the Marquis’ son, Henri, looked on. “Chromos,” she exclaimed. “They are so nice. These seem, most of them, to have come from the Alps and the Italian lakes.”

“So I should think,” said Wyversley. “That seems to me very like Como from the Villa d’Este, and that is Lecco.”

“Yes,” said Henri. “Mamma brought them home this summer. But there are also some

views of Wharfedale mixed with them. There is St. Simon's Seat."

The Lady Jessie had not intended to drive Avondale away altogether. She merely meant to instil into him a proper idea of her own dignity, and of his insignificance, and to give him to understand that he must not presume on the few words which she had deigned to exchange with him. Digby had discreetly hinted to her the reports that were already mentioned in some quarters as to Avondale's ambitious schemes; she had not only broken the same to her father, but had also added thereto much of his own surmises and beliefs. The Earl was quite aghast at the nearness of the precipice which he had been approaching; and he unhesitatingly, and, perhaps, unthinkingly, made his informant acquainted with the whole of Avondale's conversation.

"This young man must be an accomplished schemer. Why, I thought that he was simply putting before me the state of political parties, instead of which he was coolly winding his net about me. Of course his plotting would not have succeeded—I should have discovered his aims before long—but he must be a skilful

dissembler to have over-reached, in the smallest degree, a man of my sagacity. But who are with him? Had we not better inform Wharfedale, or he may, perhaps, be involved before he perceives Mr. Avondale's projects?"

Digby half smiled, he considered the Earl an even greater simpleton than he had before suspected him to be.

"What persons are in league with him? I imagine Mr. Maitland's position is not very secure, and perhaps my influence might suffice to turn the scale against him—that is supposing there is really a strong party forming against him."

"Your lordship's support would, doubtless, be most important to the Government, but I understood you had partially promised it."

"No, not promised it. I should be glad to support any Cabinet that deserved well of the country, but I cannot say I have any predilection for Mr. Maitland, or for one or two of his colleagues."

"I fear, my lord, you are prejudiced against the Premier. My brother, Woburn, and my future brother-in-law, Mordaunt Tracy, the Under

Secretary for Foreign Affairs, both think the same, and they have desired me to attempt to persuade you to take a better opinion of him. The Duke of Bayswater, who is so very anxious to get you over to their side, said that you had even declared you would not accept a dukedom from the hands of Maitland, and he was extremely grieved by your refusal."

"But I did not refuse," said Frescheville, very hastily. "Bayswater made no offer. He merely hinted this, that, and the other, and so I somewhat unceremoniously cut him short."

"A mutual misunderstanding—perhaps I had better drop Tracy a line to that effect—he is, you know, Bayswater's sub."

"Oh, no, not on any account. Maitland might think that I was anxious to get a step in the peerage, or that I would allow my decision on matters affecting the nation's eternal welfare to be swayed by the dazzle of titles and rank."

"You may make yourself easy," replied Digby. "No one who knows your lordship's character would have, for an instant, a doubt on that point." (Which was, indeed, the exact truth.)

“I trust you will excuse me for cautioning you against Mr. Avondale.”

“I am excessively obliged ; but who are those who are united with him in this insane idea, that is, supposing your surmise is correct.”

“I cannot say—perhaps we are premature in supposing any plot in existence. The facts are these. Avondale is very intimate with Jardine and with FitzHenry. Jardine made that speech in May last which led to the resignation of the Earl of Garmouth. About the same time Avondale was introduced to our host, who, by a strange coincidence, resigned immediately, as did also Sir Henry Kerr, a friend of Jardine’s. Then Avondale contested Waterbridge, running Percy Mulgrave very close, and we believe that FitzHenry obtained for him the aid of the best firm of solicitors at Waterbridge. Now we find FitzHenry and Avondale here together ; Exmoor is coming in a day or two, and his resignation is anticipated, and some one has been tampering with Herbert Williams. There, my lord, are the facts ; to which we can now add Avondale’s very noticeable conversation with yourself.”

The Earl's importance was wonderfully increased by the idea that he had been made the centre round which political intrigues were whirling. He thanked Digby—who, by the by, had gone beyond his instructions in mentioning a dukedom, but the urgency was pressing—and assured him the Ministry might rely on his aid, “so long, of course, as their deliberations were directed to proper ends,” “of which proper ends” the meaning could easily be interpreted. He then, in accents, impressive from their very solemnity, divulged to his daughter, his usual counsellor and guide, the intricate conspiracy which his penetration had detected.

The Lady Jessie was perhaps not so horrified as she ought to have been, but her vanity was somewhat ruffled at the thought that the pretty words and gallant speeches of Avondale had probably been dictated by other feelings than those of admiration. She, therefore, determined to punish him, and she succeeded so admirably as entirely to overdo her work. Avondale did not join her the whole evening, and she had the mortification of seeing that even the cold and stately Lady Lucy de Breaute, the “Queen of the

Night," as she was often styled, could smile at his sallies, and listen attentively to his conversation—the mortification, because, though her vanity had been wounded, yet her interest in Avondale was heightened by the discovery of his schemes, and, like himself, she was ambitious and eager for fame—all women are—and would not unwillingly have extended to him counsel and encouragement, and, perhaps, even more.

But the bird did not return to his cage; and next morning the Earl's supercilious nod to Avondale, and his haughty stare, defeated all hopes of reconciliation. FitzHenry noticed the change—

“One of your card houses blown down?”

“Looks very like it, my dear sir. ‘An enemy hath been sowing tares;’ but it is most fortunate that Frescheville has thus early come out in his real colours. He wants a marquisate; had he waited a week or two longer, and led us on further he might have acquired information which Maitland would have purchased with a dukedom.”

“Well, don't look so annoyed. It will do you good to learn there are other plotters as skilful as yourself, and other intellects as far-seeing

as your own. But perhaps you can recover the lost ground."

"I fear not. Digby has been, I dare say, commissioned to conclude the negociation on any terms—if so, it's '*bon jour au Comte de Frescheville.*'"

Any doubts on the matter were resolved that evening. Avondale was leaning over the back of a lounge on which Lady Campion was sitting and whispering some choice piece of scandal into her ear; his face and hers being in somewhat dangerous proximity. Lady Jessie had just concluded a song, and was moving from the piano, when, at the same moment, Lady Campion rather suddenly half turned her head, and her cheek came so close to Avondale's lips as to raise a very reasonable suspicion in the mind of an observer that she felt their touch. It was a most unfortunate *contretemps*. Lady Jessie Frescheville alone noticed it; but she was the person who would put the worst possible construction upon it. A woman never forgives a man for making a fool of her, and, least of all, a young and beautiful woman who deems herself thrown aside for a rival. Lady Jessie Frescheville

jumped to the inevitable conclusion, but she showed not a sign of feeling, save that her glance, even as it rested for the moment on Avondale, changed to one of strong indifference, and she majestically resumed her seat by Lady Wharfedale.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEXT morning several of the visitors went for a ride down the Vale. As they returned some of the gentlemen put their steeds to one or two of the hedges. Avondale, who was on Sir Henri, cleared them in fine style, while Digby and Wyversley, whose hacks were of much inferior breed, showed to great disadvantage.

“It’s the horse, rather than the rider, that’s in fault, Wyversley,” said Sir Edward Wharton. “Better ask Avondale to let you try Sir Henri.”

“No, thanks, I object to that brute on principle. Let Brayclift try him.”

“Rather not,” said the Marquis; “rather not—beg to decline the honour, as I have some regard for my limbs. Besides, the mare I am on is pretty good at the fences; she has not smashed through them like you and Digby have. I thought Digby was somewhat of an equestrian—either he or his horse has been libelled. If

he is not afraid he had better try Sir Henri at the next leap, if only to recover his credit."

"I should be delighted," exclaimed Digby. "I have been envious of Avondale, who has appropriated that splendid horse."

"Better leave him alone," said Wyversley maliciously; "he would pitch you off. You have a good seat, but I doubt much if you have nerve enough."

Digby, however, was very pressing; so at length Avondale yielded, and changed horses.

"Don't trust to the stirrups at all," he said, as Digby mounted, "but stick your knees well into him; hold the rein tight, but don't worry him with the curb."

Digby got along finely. Meanwhile the ladies had gone on some distance in advance; the gentlemen behind therefore went off at a trot to overtake them. The trot became smarter, next a gallop, finally a race. Sir Henri's blood was up, he grew unmanageable, then bolted. There was a general shout of consternation. Away he sped, his head out, the bit between his teeth, both reins—he had tugged them from Digby's hands—hanging over his neck, and Digby holding

on, fearfully, tightly, grimly, to the pummel. Lady Campion and Sir Marmaduke Alton heard the horse's clatter, and drew aside to let him pass. Frescheville, Sir Hugh Campion, Lady Lucy de Breaute and the Marchioness did the same. On the horse went. A hundred yards ahead, just off the road, was the Dead Man's Gap. Sir Henri had not forgotten it. He turned [from the road, and leaped it as if for amusement, and then continued his headlong course on the other side of the Wharfe, and so on home. But Digby was not on him. In utmost terror at the ravine yawning before him, he threw himself from his horse, and there he lay within a dozen feet of the brink, one leg fractured and his head broken, but not dangerously injured. They speedily obtained aid, placed him on a rough litter, and conveyed him to the Towers. The Marquis and FitzHenry, alarmed by the arrival of the horse covered with foam, riderless, came to meet the party, and though they condoled with Digby, they were glad to find him and not Avondale the sufferer.

“It will be well nigh Christmas,” said the

lawyer to Avondale, "before he leaves his room. I hope you are satisfied."

"Perfectly."

"It was too bad of you," said Lady Wharfedale; "you are as spiteful as a woman."

Lady Jessie gave him a look, in which were strongly mingled the wish that Avondale had met with the mishap, and regret that she had to be completely separated from him.

CHAPTER IX.

THE Duke and Duchess of Strathclyde were received with the utmost respect and ceremony. The Marquis and Lady Wharfedale met them at the entrance to the Hall ; and they passed down a double line of retainers that extended from the door to the foot of the grand staircase, whence the steward conducted them to the state apartments. A half-hour later they were ushered with similar pomp into the magnificent drawing-room. The visitors all rose—they numbered more than sixty—and after due sorting they filed off to the Hall. The tables on the daïs were not brought into requisition, because, as there were not enough persons to fill up all, it would have been most invidious and in the worst taste to have made any distinction, and to have assigned some to a position of honour and others to a lower grade. The Marquis and his most distinguished guests took the centre of the three tables.

Avondale found himself near the head of one of the others, with Mrs. Bransdon—she and her husband had also come to the Towers that morning—on one hand and Wyversley next her, and Sir Hugh Campion on the other ; the gentlemen considerably exceeding the ladies. It was an imposing festival. The Hall was brightly lit up by lamps hung from the ceiling, and its panels and wainscoting of oak, dark with age, reflected the rays as from polished mirrors. In one of the galleries was a band of musicians, whose strains every now and again reverberated through the vast room. Crowds of servants were in waiting, many of them dressed in the garb of Elizabeth's reign. Looking down on the assembly gleamed portraits of many of the notabilities of the family ; and on the daïs and by the side walls were arranged numerous complete suits of armour, some which usually stood there, others brought for the special occasion from the armoury.

“What do you think of it?” asked Mrs. Bransdon of Avondale.

“Grand ; is it not ?” replied the latter.

“It reminds me of one of the gorgeous

pageants," said Mrs. Bransdon, "in which our forefathers so much delighted—which were held on the wedding of a monarch, for instance."

"Or an Indian durbar," added Avondale, "where the rulers of millions ride hundreds of miles to pay obeisance to an English commoner."

"But that is purely glitter and tinsel—mere barbaric splendour. Here you have the highest refinement of modern life set off by surroundings that remind you of the past. Besides, the people we see here have not come together to pay homage to their entertainer, or humbly to acknowledge themselves the slaves of him or of the power which he represents."

"I suppose not; but, nevertheless, they most of them instinctively recognise the existence of intellectual superiority, and they pay homage to it in fact, if not in word. Look at the whole lot carefully, Mrs. Bransdon. Not a dozen but bear some epithet, which says they are of a different class to the rest of humanity, but there the distinction ends. Two men present, a lawyer and an author, will within a period that may be counted by perhaps months, be the leaders and directors

whom these people and others like them will be contentedly following."

"I am sure," said Mrs. Bransdon laughing, "I feel immensely flattered by the high opinion you have of my husband's ability. I will certainly relate to him your pretty speech. But all your speeches are not so pretty, nor are all your actions so amiable. The Marchioness found me just now to tell me how you entrapped Hubert Digby into mounting some very vicious horse, and that he has narrowly escaped death in consequence."

"Poor Digby, how savage he must be lying in bed with a bandaged leg and a bruised head, and knowing what a grand feast is going on below. But it serves him right—it is solely through his ambition o'erleaping itself—or its saddle, whichever is the proper mode of reading that quotation."

"Take care your ambition does not meet with a similar fall."

"It has had one already—a very severe one. Lord Frescheville has haughtily snubbed me as being a common-place plotter, and has entrusted his political conscience to the guidance of

Digby—has loaned it him, in fact, in trust, as the lawyers say, for the benefit of Maitland, a Marquisate being the price demanded for the service. And the Lady Jessie has filled up my cup of bitterness, by sending me the willow wand, and directing the light of her countenance to this same fortunate gentleman.”

“Dear me, what an unlucky being you must be. But you have survived these accumulated hardships, and indeed seem at present to be suffering under no overpowering depression of spirits.”

“Could I possibly be so at present, Mrs. Bransdon? But you really ought not to fish for compliments. Even if the craving for them be one of the instincts implanted in woman’s nature—”

“That will do, sir. There’s no man I know who is not fully as accessible to flattery as the most frivolous woman, and Mr. Walter Avondale is not free from such a weakness—he may, perhaps, give it some more sounding designation, fame, renown, or what not.”

“What’s that?” asked Wyversley. “Mrs. Bransdon paying you a compliment, I presume,

Walter, from the lively tone in which she spoke."

"Most decidedly, though I could not appreciate it. She says that every man is more conceited than his neighbour, and that Lord Frescheville, yourself, Percy Mulgrave, and your humble servant — she lumped us all together; rather flattering to you and me—are the choicest specimens she can select."

"I trust your lordship will not believe a word he is saying," exclaimed Mrs. Bransdon. "He is not one bit improved since the summer."

"While, on the contrary," continued Avondale, "all women—and who can deny the assertion?—are houris, saints, immortelles, each more lovely, more stainless, more enchanting than the other, and that of all the most enchantingly agreeable is the wife of the Member for Darts-worth."

"Pray, Mr. Avondale, don't be quite so absurd," said Mrs. Bransdon, in a tone as expressive of anger as she could make it.

"Pardon me," replied Avondale, "if I have given offence. But I can scarcely restrain myself; I am so thoroughly enjoying myself at Fresche-

ville's expense. Look at him ; was ever dullness and mediocrity better pourtrayed ? But it is not that which amuses me. See how enraged he is at the consideration shown the Duke. There was not so much fuss made about himself when he came, and the shock to his pride is most intense. His face is a perfect study. He is trying to assume at the same instant an appearance of hauteur, importance, wisdom, condescension and dignity, and the result is a failure."

"You are too harsh on him ; he does not seem well."

"It's mental, not physical, pain he is suffering. The Lady Jessie, too—what do you think, Mrs. Bransdon?—she actually yawned at me yesterday."

"Abominable ! heartless ! How did you resent such an indignity ?"

"Handed her over to the care of Digby. That was punishment ample, though she pretended to think on the contrary. She is, I warrant, much more inclined to yawn now, with Ryston as her attendant. A nice promising individual that

for the heir apparent of an earl. But he might, at the least, try to talk to his neighbour instead of so very carefully looking to his plate and the wine glasses."

Soon a flourish of trumpets announced the close of the banquet. Ladies and gentlemen withdrew together to the drawing-room. An impromptu ball followed, and it was morn ere the company separated.

"I have been thinking you were lost," said Lady Campion, "till I saw you a few minutes since earnestly conversing with Exmoor."

"Lost, my dear Lady Campion, from such an assembly as this! The remembrance of it will live in my breast for many a day."

"Pooh, pooh! Ambition will put other thoughts into your head, and you will soon forget the friends who saw you taking the first steps upon the road to the Temple of Fame."

"Forget, Lady Campion! You don't mean what you are saying. Whose flower was this? It was given me two days since, yet it is still fresh and vigorous. If I forget not trifles, can I forget the thoughts and hopes that send the

blood coursing, with a quickening circulation, through the heart ?”

“I dare say. ‘Men are deceivers ever.’ What was the Marchioness saying to you?—something very interesting, of course.”

“Very interesting. She warned me not to fall in love. No, I am wrong—it was about Digby. She rowed me finely. But she has really once cautioned me against the sportive god; yet you give me the directly contrary advice. Which am I to follow?”

“I cannot say. I would I might. But you probably would not attend to me.”

“I should most certainly.”

“So you say. Why, then, do you not tender a discreet apology to Jessie Frescheville? She would not refuse it; she seems completely bored. And no man should hesitate to atone for his offence if he has given a lady cause for complaint.”

“But I have given her no cause. I have asked her for one of the dances, but she was engaged. She was not engaged, however, Wyversley says, till Ryston asked her afterwards; and I am delighted to say that my lord Ryston contrived to

entangle his foot in the dress she is wearing, and to damage it most disastrously. The Earl, too—have you noticed him?—has been stalking about with a countenance as expressive of pleasure as if he were the Demon of Melancholy. Their visit is not over for the next ten days or fortnight, but I should not be surprised if it came to a sudden end to-morrow.”

Avondale’s suspicion proved correct. The Earl, after perusing his letters next morning, pleaded unexpected urgent business, and left by mid-day, tendering profuse apologies for the suddenness of his departure.

CHAPTER X.

AVONDALE, without much grief, saw Frescheville, safely off. It was only in deference to the express wish of the Marquis that he had paid court to the pompous dignitary ; but the task had been most disagreeable, and he was greatly relieved now that it had definitely come to a conclusion. He, too, had many letters by that day's post. One from Stuart Jardine :—

“ How are you getting on with the bribery and corruption business? I presume you give it some different designation when ‘ bloated aristocrats and turnip-headed squires ’ (*vide* speech of James Muddler, Esq., at Grantham, on Saturday last), instead of greengrocers and tallow chandlers, are the beings whose sentiments are to be made chime in with our own ; but of course experience acquired at Waterbridge will stand you good service in your present avocation. Abel, the member for the county, one of the subs

in the Finance Office, has been persistently pumping the Governor, ever since we returned, to know what you are up to, but I fancy he not only got nothing for his pains, but threw away needlessly the scraps of information which he had favoured the Governor with as an inducement to lead him on to a similar confidence. There has been a shindy between Sloe, Blocke Head, and Sir Edward Pilgrim ; about what I can't say, but it was as much as the Duke of Bayswater could do to patch up a reconciliation. Pilgrim was going to resign, so I suppose it was something about the Church. You have Lord Frescheville with you—don't waste any blandishments on him ; Bayswater has already bought him. But he is such a mass of self-conceit that he would be dear at any price. By the by, Abel has suggested that Sir Charles McLeod Jardine, Bart., of Glenullyn, would sound well, especially if the said Jardine were substituted in place of Kelley as Chief Commissioner of Customs. Governor objected strongly to a partnership ; and then it was further suggested that perhaps Rowe would make a better Minister of Education than Herbert Williams, whose

tenure of office is considered to be very uncertain. Rather accommodating, was it not?

“I trust you find life at Egremond Towers somewhat more exciting than it is here. I am already getting weary of the country, and dread the next two months. We have killed off all the grouse, save a few birds that have banded together for mutual protection and put out sentinels to give warning of the approach of invaders. I am going over to Kerr’s, at Ballock next week, and the latter part of November I have promised to spend with Stansville in Northumberland—he has some very good pheasant shooting. After that I believe we return to town.

“The governor will be with you next Monday or Tuesday. He is brimful of politics, and judging from the names given in the ‘Times,’ the Marquis will have enough of both Houses of Parliament at Egremond to form a Ministry, and improvisate debates amongst yourselves.”

Messrs. Rosse and Taylor wrote that the Commission had been opened on Monday, and that it would be well for him to be ready for giving evi-

dence, if called upon, before the close of next week.

His sister sent her usual billet of encouragement and affection. She had an item of information upon which she dwelt at great length—Miss Vrynné and her father had returned. Edith was never tired of talking to her brother about Florence Vrynné, and a long letter was now completely filled up with an account of her travels, her appearance, her words, even her wishes. A few minutes Avondale mused over the letter, half-wondering at the interest his sister displayed; but he dismissed the matter with “a girl’s friendship,” and turned his thoughts to the race he was running.

CHAPTER XI.

LATER on in the day he encountered Lady Campion. "Heard the news, Mr. Avondale?" she asked.

"What news? The coachmen did not, I hope, employ 'Sir Henri' to convey Lord Frescheville to Ilkley."

"You hope exactly the contrary, but the Earl and the Countess and the Lady Jessie were safely deposited in the train. It has nothing to do with them. The second post has this minute come in, it brings news—what do you think?"

"Cannot guess—my inventive faculty is very weak."

"A batch of new knights and baronets—guess their names."

"That's easy enough—they are certain to be the biggest duffers in existence. Sammy Simpkins will be one. His wife would not have allowed him to vote so consistently for Maitland if

“she had not seen something was to be made out of it.”

“Yes, it is Mr. Simpkins.”

“Is it really true? You are not poking fun at me? It was only a blind shot of mine.”

“It is positively true. Exmoor has received a note from Lord Tintern. There had been some talk about it, but the names had not been definitely settled, and I can see that Exmoor is somewhat more than annoyed at the list sent him.”

“Not at all unlikely. Simpkins’ wife is the sister of that man Muddler, and the giving a baronetcy—I suppose it is not less—to him is a direct insult to Exmoor. But so much the better.”

“Of course it is so much the better—the better, that is, for your purposes. Every occurrence is to be estimated according as it makes for or against your schemes. Politics! politics! nothing else. All day you are planning, plotting, labouring for the one end, at night I suppose your dreams are tinged with the same subject. What a strange young man you are. All other thoughts are banished from your brain.”

“Oh, no. Ambition may be my loadstone,

but other thoughts are not banished. I, too, build air castles and tenant them with fairy forms. I see the gates of Fame's grand temple opened wide, but another enters with me to claim the coronet of glory."

"And you will accomplish your undertaking if you are only true to yourself. And then—and then—"

"And then I shall not forget the past, as you have so unkindly asserted I shall. The words you spoke last night have not left me yet. They have prompted two or three verses as an attempt at reply. I can give you the air though not the full setting."

He touched lightly the keys of a piano, and read with a low voice the lines—

FORGOTTEN ?

Forgotten? And do you then venture to ask me
Such a question as that, Lady Clare?
So long in your smiles have I basked me,
Did I wish to withdraw, could I dare?

Forgotten? So tightly your chains are around me,
How can I break them off, Lady Clare?
'Tis you, who in fetters have bound me,
Who alone can my freedom declare.

Forgotten? forgotten? Oh never! oh never!
While remembrance remains, Lady Clare;
Our hearts with our lives death may sever,
But for thee will I breathe my last prayer.

She extended her hand to take the paper. It touched Avondale's, and it was burning hot. He did not dare to look in her face, for he knew he should read there confirmation of what he felt ; and he could not speak for words were trembling on his tongue, eager for utterance, which even now his reason told him must not be spoken. A long, still pause, and then Clare Campion tottered to the nearest seat, and Walter Avondale hastily left the room. He was a prey to many conflicting emotions ; passion was agitating and rending his soul ; he almost sickened with the whirl of thoughts that chased each other tumultuously through his brain ; he knew not where or how to calm himself, and would have returned to her he had just quitted, but a warning voice rang in his ear—

“Pray God your affections may be turned towards a proper object. Heaven pity the woman if they are not—and you too. It will be destruction to her, ruin to you, and may be madness to both.”

Was it conscience spake ? or had he heard those words before ? They seemed familiar, and yet he could not remember them. Most strange

is that faculty of the mind whereby it recalls certain facts and occurrences, eliminated from all the associations that had caused their first adherence. Thus they rise up before us, distinct, naked, individual, and we doubt whether they are present creations of the intellect or mere reproductions of what has already been. So Avondale was uncertain whence came, what originated the caution; for though his memory was most powerful as a whole, yet it now and then proved faulty on unimportant points—it could grasp readily and comprehend the outlines of a subject, it was only with difficulty that it could acquire and retain the minutiae.

CHAPTER XII.

WHILE thus vacillating, longing yet dreading, to turn back, he met FitzHenry. "Good day, Avondale, I have not seen you this morning yet—you are just the man I want. Heard the news yet?"

"That Sammy Simpkins is made a baronet—Yes. Hope Exmoor likes it. Any one else?"

"Lloyd Davies."

"What! the frantic Dissenting parson, who nearly upset Herbert Williams at the last election. Maitland has a knack of rubbing the sore points of his colleagues."

"Don't forget Davies is nephew or something of the kind to Sloe. Wooden Leatherhead next."

"Who represents the seven wise men of Gothane—good."

"Stanhope Broome."

"Who defeated Bransdon at Marshfield and then sold out in favour of Blocke Head—good, very good."

“We want you to improve the occasion. Exmoor is in the bay parlour with Lady Wharfedale and one or two others—go in and contrive to work upon his annoyance. I will join you presently.”

The Marchioness looked up as Avondale entered.

“I have not seen you yet to-day, Mr. Avondale. You were not at breakfast or lunch.”

“You had left the table before I came to breakfast. Wyversley and myself went for an early walk—the morning tempted us. I believe I have to congratulate your ladyship on the honour conferred upon your friend Mr. Samuel Simpkins.”

“My friend! Mr. Avondale!

“You took great interest in him last summer, and must, doubtless, be greatly delighted to find that others beside yourself are able to appreciate genuine merit.”

The Marchioness knew not whether to laugh or frown at Avondale’s quiet tone of sarcasm.

“The choice does credit to the discrimination of the Ministry,” he went on, addressing Exmoor, whose face showed him to be in a desperately bad humour. Exmoor looked savagely at him, and,

being unable to determine if he spoke in banter or in seriousness, replied—

“Ah—so you think.”

“If all the selections are of the same kind, the country will form but one opinion of the good taste and judgment of the Ministry,” he continued.

Exmoor stared dubiously, but did not speak.

“Mr. Samuel—Sir Samuel Simpkins, I beg his pardon—is such an active, energetic man, so very determined. His election for Dirty Lucre cost him £7,000, and he polled nearly 400 voters. He is an excellent specimen of the shopkeeping fraternity, the very type of a successful tradesman, attentive to his business, submissive to his customers, civil, obliging, honest, never, so ’tis affirmed, convicted, even when a retail dealer, of short weight ; always at his desk by nine o’clock, and not making his clerks come more than half an hour earlier, and seldom working them above fifteen hours in a day. And then, such a worthy man—he has built three chapels. It is the truth, Lady Wharfedale, you should not laugh,”—it was really FitzHenry laughing, he being in the rear of Exmoor—“three whole chapels ; and

he gives the ministers £50 a year each ; and, on Sundays, he invites them, by turns, to dine with him. He pays, too, all the expense of lighting and heating, putting the pew-rents into his pocket, in order not to blazon forth to the world, by publishing accounts, the greatness of his charity. So upright that some envious spirits are anxious to cast dirt upon his reputation, and the Custom House officers have even ventured, once or twice, to lay informations against him, but they, as the Rev. David Malachi Twaddle, pastor of the chapel last built, piously observed, ‘were doubtless urged on by the machinations of the Prince of Darkness, who is ever prowling about ready to lay hands upon sinners, and is especially desirous of seizing our beloved Samuel, for of such is the kingdom of Heaven.’ If Mr. Twaddle’s argument seems at all faulty, Lady Wharfedale, it is probably because the rev. gentleman is a subscriber to the ‘Morning Mercury.’ ”

Here FitzHenry and Bransdon, who had been labouring under an uncontrollable propensity to laugh, simultaneously blew their noses with much unnecessary noise ; and Exmoor, with the least approach to a smile, observed—

“I was not aware he was so extremely devout.”

“His wife, too, is such a motherly personage, so stout, so very—uh—aristocratic, with such a red countenance. She always reminds me of my bed maker at Trinity, such a considerate woman she was, who never allowed my butter, or jam, or marmalade, to get stale; and gave my tea and sugar to my cat, and fed the canary on any cold meat that might be left, to save it being wasted, and who was troubled with ‘a little ’oarseness, which nothing didn’t do no good to, but a little brandy.’ The Marchioness was excessively charmed with her appearance at the Horticultural Show, in May, with her bonnet strings fluttering in the air, and her bran new grenadine trailing its gorgeous length along, and her seven daughters attendant—such engaging creatures! Wyversley fell desperately in love with one, the oldest, but, as he, unfortunately, could not catch either eye, both of them being somewhat erratic in their movements, ’twas all in vain he sighed his sighs, and breathed his prayers.”

Wyversley attempted a reply, but his indignant denial was drowned by a peal of laughter, in the

midst of which the Marquis and the Duke entered.

"Stanhope Broome is another of the new dignitaries," said Exmoor, glancing at Bransdon.

"I am delighted to hear it," replied Avondale. "Broome's character is most estimable. How nobly he resigned his seat to Blocke Head, when that most talented and capable gentleman had failed to secure his election. How splendidly he behaved while the contest was going on at Marshfield, between him and Henderson,"—Bransdon was shifting, as though his chair was most uncomfortable—"it was Henderson, I think? How very chivalrously he spoke of him. How he lauded the talents and ability of his opponent—'a person who had wandered over the world, prying into the affairs of other nations, and was now come back to prove to us that other people were quite as good as ourselves, and that their Governments were, perhaps, in some respects, superior to our own.' How very carefully he avoided the slightest allusion to topics which might inflame the mob, or arouse their ill-will against Henderson. What very slight mention he made of his own doings and labours—the

twenty years that he had been owner of the largest factory in Marshfield—his small annual subscriptions to the town charities—the market house that he had rebuilt—the common that he had enclosed near the town ; no, I mistake, he did not refer to that. An admirable man ! The country will be obliged to you, my lord, for the honour so aptly bestowed.”

“ So I should think,” said Exmoor, “ and, of course, you are of the same opinion, Bransdon ? ”

“ There is to be a new knight, Avondale, in addition to the baronets. Who do you think it is ? ” asked FitzHenry.

“ Cannot imagine, unless Maitland has appointed, on his own responsibility, and without consulting his colleagues ; and then, I presume, it would be Gregory Gobble.”

“ Well done, Walter,” said the Marquis, “ a capital guess.”

“ You must be joking, my lord,” replied Avondale. “ It surely cannot be Gobble, the election-general of Maitland’s own set.”

“ It is, I assure you.”

“ Then— ” he paused ; “ then I beg leave to tender to the Marquis of Exmoor my congratula-

tions on the share which England will assume he has had in such a gross outrage on public morality and decency, and I would humbly submit as a proper person for the vacant garter William Calcraft, Esq.”

CHAPTER XIII.

EXMOOR arose, and, taking the Duke and Wharfedale by the arm, passed from the room. Bransdon, FitzHenry, and Avondale followed. They entered the library.

“What are your plans, Wharfedale?” asked Exmoor, abruptly.

“To form a party out of the moderate men on both sides.”

“I know, but how do you purpose accomplishing this?”

“How are all oppositions rendered successful? By turning to best advantage the slips the enemy makes, and by carefully watching till he at last lays himself open to a *coup de grace*.”

“I know that, too—it is not what I mean. What are—what are your watchwords?—the principles which you fancy will be cries around which a party can rally?”

The Marquis looked at FitzHenry, and then

both at Avondale, who spoke slowly, but clearly, with cheek flushed and eye flashing, for he felt that, though his listeners were few, the present consultation was the crisis of his affairs—

“Three,—first, dislike for the present Premier.”

“You may dislike him, sir, and so do others; you may say that he is without tact, and cursed with a wretched temper, and so do others; but you cannot say he is not a great man. That first cry will meet with little support.”

“More, much more, I think, my lord, than you are willing to admit. Second, the throwing open more widely the portals of the National Church, not the separation of Church and State; and the extending and liberalising, not the secularising, of education.”

“Good; that cry will secure many adherents.”

“Third, the knitting together into one grand empire the whole of the British dominions, even though such a consolidation should necessitate the abolition, in its present form, of the House of Peers; even though it should require England to give up its autocracy, and to enter, not as parent, but as eldest sister, into the confederacy.”

“ Good ; that cry may be but a dream, but it will bring over to you every youthful member of Parliament. I should be glad to see it realised, even at the cost you name, but I fear it never will be—what say you, Bransdon ?”

“ I do not see the impracticability, far less the impossibility, of accomplishing it. The country, however, is not yet ready for the discussion of it. But every advance in science—every discovery that quickens locomotion, that renders less dilatory our means of communicating with distant regions—will make more feasible such a consummation ; and, what more than aught else will aid it, will be bad harvests, following on slackened trade, and inducing semi-starvation to multitudes of our operatives. But, Exmoor, though I firmly believe such a vast dominion as Avondale has pictured, as I myself have dreamed of, must, in time to come, be built up, though I believe, too, that many of our countrymen now and again catch an indistinct glimpse of it, yet I frankly confess that I believe, even more firmly, that the first cry—hostility to the Premier—will be the most attractive, and win over to us our most numerous associates. The nation is not

ripe for great measures, far less for undergoing the life-long labour and the stupendous changes necessary for the realisation of an heroic ideal. Parliament aptly represents the spirit of the hour. It is content to waste its sessions in petty plot and intrigue, content to provide for the nation's daily existence. We must take it as it is, guide its whims and control its fancies as best may serve our immediate ends, then educate, prompt, incite it, and infuse new strength, new vigour, new vitality into it, to seek after a more glorious object."

Exmoor had listened attentively.

"I do not deny that the nation is drifting onward into time, without aim or purpose, without pilot or helmsman. I bitterly regret that it is so. Nor do I deny that it would be easy enough to eject the Ministry of which, at present, I am one, from their posts as officers of the vessel. The question is, who will replace them to more advantage. Can we? Can you, Bransdon, point out the far distant shore which the ship is to make for and discern the tortuous channel by which she must reach it? Have you, Wharfedale, confidence enough in yourself to say that you

will stick unfalteringly to the helm when the breakers are on either hand, and the white foam is seething against the sides, and the wind is roaring through the rigging, stripping off the sails and hurling overboard the crew, and the wreckers have lit the false fires that blind and dazzle and lure you on to ruin? And if, midst the roar, a leak is sprung, and the water comes gurgling in, gaining inch by inch upon the pumps, can you, FitzHenry, man yourself to stand beside the wearied sailors and utter words of courage and of comfort while the storm more loudly rages and the blackness deeper grows, and the bark slowly settles down?"

No one broke the silence.

"I speak seriously," he said, "for it seems to me that the time is come when those who assume the task of guiding the nation should assume it with full knowledge of the responsibility."

"You speak almost too seriously, Herbert," said the Duke of Strathclyde, "or I should rather say too timidly. Do not conjure up difficulties which do not, or dangers which may not, exist. I have every belief in Britain's future. There is a wonderful fund of vitality in every people, and

in none more so than in the Anglo-Saxon race. Moreover you look at only one side of the matter. The dangers that beset the nation will equally beset it whoever may be at the head of affairs; and they will be the more inimical in proportion as the Government is weak and incapable. Let the question which you ask yourself be, can a firmer, more united, more able Cabinet be formed than that now in office?"

"I think such can be formed," said Wharfedale and Bransdon.

"I am certain it can be," said FitzHenry.

"And why are you certain?" enquired Exmoor.
"What support can you rely upon?"

"Excuse me, my lord," broke in Avondale, "but over caution is worse than downright cowardice. If every tiny circumstance is to be duly allowed for, and every counteracting cause is to have fit weight assigned it; if we are to hesitate here dreading Sloe's vituperation or Rowe's envy, Bayndon's abuse or Simpkin's vulgarity; if we are to pause there lest we offend against Blocke Head's obtuseness or Mulgrave's incapacity, Maitland's condescension or Greenham Softhead's conceit; if we are to do all this

before we venture to proceed, and even then to shiver at the impending consequences of our temerity—I conceive, pardon my presumption, my lord, and deem my opinion expressed with the utmost deference—I conceive that the Marquis of Wharfedale had better pray your lordship to let words now spoken escape your memory, and strive himself with the assistance of those who have hitherto counselled him to mature his plans.”

“Well spoken, Avondale,” said Exmoor, smiling. “I like you for your candour, and your sarcasm; you know where to find the weak points in one’s armour, and how to play upon the sore places. You will be of assistance to any party if you ever enter the House. But granting we are strong in numbers, to whom do you propose to allot the chief posts? We shall not detach all my colleagues; we cannot coalesce with the Tories.”

“It is a question the Marquis should answer.”

“No, go on, Avondale,” said Wharfedale.

“Go on,” added FitzHenry.

“We shall not need leaders,” continued Avondale, thus emboldened. “Yourself would retain

your own post; Bransdon, Kerr, Jardine, Herbert Williams, Tintern, Kelley, would take the Foreign, Indian, Colonial, Education, Home, Finance offices respectively; the Duke of Strathclyde would be Lord President; the Marquis, Prime Minister; the Duke of Lincoln, Privy Seal; Lord Hainsbury, Secretary for Ireland; the Earl of Cotteswold, Chief Commissioner of the Poor Law Board; Sir Edward Pilgrim goes on the woolsack; Mr. FitzHenry becomes Attorney-General."

"Good, good," all had muttered approvingly as he slowly mentioned each name.

"And have you no place for me?" asked Ravenshurst, who, with Wyversley, had been listening. "I may be a scholar and a dilettante, perhaps, but I should like to be with my friends."

"Better go with myself as Bransdon's subs."

"I should be highly flattered," said Bransdon. "Cannot you also utilise some of those young peers who are literally dying of inanity? Wyversley for instance."

"Let them be attached to different departments as supernumeraries. Six of the offices

would be presided over by commoners ; to each of these might be added a youthful member of the Upper House.”

“ A very good suggestion.”

“ Well, Exmoor, what is it to be ?” asked the Marquis. “ For myself, I am perfectly willing to take any post if that would influence your decision ; change with Strathclyde for example.”

“ No, no,” said the Duke, “ I have never proposed joining any Government at all, but you have been so persuading, and Mr. Avondale and Bransdon have put such a different colouring on the political world as I have hitherto seen it, that I suppose I must change my determination. The present arrangement does capitally, if, that is, it can be carried out. Tintern is doubtful, Lincoln is half a Conservative, and Cotteswold is wholly one. But I, at least, will not raise obstacles where they may not exist.”

Exmoor looked round the group ; his glance was of mingled doubt and hesitation ; he turned towards the window, and noticing the brightness of the declining sun, said—

“ It is an hour to post time ; come out in the fresh air, Wharfedale, and you, Strathclyde.”

They did so.

“The first part of the attack is successfully concluded, Avondale,” said FitzHenry. “This evening’s post bears Exmoor’s resignation to the Premier. You may as well drop Jardine a line to tell him so.”

CHAPTER XIV.

AVONDALE had the honour of conducting Lady Lucy de Breaute to dinner, which was laid in the hall, in accordance with the custom when many visitors were at the Towers. "So the list of new titles scarcely comes up to your standard of worthiness," she said.

"Not altogether; and I presume you would object to admitting some of them into your own circle."

"Not at all—if they can get any one to introduce them."

"If! obstacle amply sufficient. But you will have, in a few more days, a flood of peers—*novi homines*—overwhelming the old aristocracy."

"Perhaps. Have you any idea of them?"

"Percy Mulgrave, first. He will be ejected from Waterbridge, that's *un fait accompli*. But being Irish Secretary, he must be in Parliament—it's an indispensable qualification of the post.

Therefore, unless he should be declared guilty of personal bribery, direct and clear, Maitland will raise him to the peerage. Lady Thanet, too, would not object to changing the title which she has assumed, and to which she has no right, even by courtesy. Strickland will be another. Mordaunt Tracy and Hubert Digby, his sons-in-law, *in esse* and *in posse* will answer for him."

"Some will be raised a step, I suppose?"

"No doubt—Frescheville one. But if he gets even an Irish Marquisate it will be paying a high price for him. To let him remove the pearls from over the strawberry leaves would be an indignity to the rest of the order."

"Sir Marmaduke Alton—is he a supporter of Mr. Maitland?"

"I imagine so—why? He commands half-a-dozen seats in the Lake district. Maitland has not been sounding him, has he?"

"I don't know—I am not *politique*," she replied, with a smile. "Mr. Head has been staying at Coniston, and Sir George Edmunds, and Mr. and Mrs. Maitland for a couple of days; but, of course, that means nothing. Is not Mr. Maitland's son seeking a seat?"

“So it is reported,” replied Avondale, who began to think that, perhaps, Alton might, like Frescheville, have been already tampered with.

“There was a Baron Coniston some centuries back. Sir Marmaduke has an idea that he is entitled to it by the female line,” continued Lady Lucy, smiling still more meaningly.

“Maitland is welcome to him. He is quite as useless and pompous as Frescheville, though possessed of rather more brains. We have secured Exmoor; he is worth twenty such men as the baronet, even if they have two or three pocket boroughs each.”

“So papa tells me. I am delighted. Herbert is so very excellent, such an—don’t laugh”—with a slight toss of the head, as she noticed Avondale’s look of amusement—“don’t laugh, it is not polite—I have known him a long time. I won’t tell you what papa said about yourself.”

“Oh, Lady Lucy,” pleaded Avondale, “you are a thorough tyrant. I daren’t even have a thought of my own.”

“Well, sir, papa said”—there he is nodding to you; he wishes to say something to you—“Papa told me how well you had spoken—and Mr.

Bransdon, too—in the library, and that your arguments had won over Herbert, who had hesitated so long, and that you have the whole Cabinet ready formed. I should so like to have heard you—I wish I had been a man.”

“You! I thought you ‘sailed with supreme dominion through the azure depth of air,’ high above the cares and strifes that vex inferior mortals.”

“Very few of us are so completely free from mundane concerns; perhaps no woman but sets up a goal which she tries to reach.”

“And a woman’s truest ambition directs her to a goal far more enviable, and far nobler, than that to which man’s unsteady passions can direct him.”

The listener blushed, as though in the few words lay an allusion whose point she could perceive. Then she said,—“‘Man’s unsteady passions,’ Mr. Avondale—I may say, using your own expression, that I have considered you free from feeling and sentiment, that you had the cool head and emotionless nerves of an aged diplomatist or lawyer.”

“You have yourself given a reply. We cannot

remove ourselves from sympathy with our kin. But while a man's heart is essentially inconstant, variable, wavering, a woman's is unchangeable, steadfast, sure, ever pure and true, ever devoted to the one object, like the sun which shines with a steady light from day to day, though clouds may interpose to separate the face of the earth from him."

"Very pretty—the latter part—but I fear somewhat incorrect," she replied, as the guests rose.

In the drawing room, Lady Wharfedale congratulated Avondale.

"Ralph says all the credit of gaining Exmoor must be given to you. Poor Maitland! I really pity him, to see his colleagues thus dropping off, and an Opposition thus formidable created months before the session. And what a flattering tongue you must have! What were you saying at dinner to Lucy? She was actually laughing—a most extraordinary occurrence—and blushing—which is scarcely less than a miracle. Exmoor will be jealous of you."

"He need not be, though I rather believe Lady Lucy would be somewhat pleased if he were."

“Do you really think so? We all should be so glad.”

“It is Exmoor’s fault, not the lady’s.”

“Perhaps so. But Exmoor is not altogether a marrying man; he has been devoted to politics, and had a seat in the House ever since he came of age, and, consequently, has had no time for what Mr. Avondale would call less important topics. Lucy is rather exacting, and has snubbed him once or twice; and thus it has happened as it is. But see, she is going to the piano, with Exmoor—you must be an enchanter. She has a splendid voice. I hope she will give us ‘Lorelei’—you know it, Mr. Avondale.”

Yes, Avondale knew it. It had been a favourite song of his, but never yet had the words spoken with such meaning to him as then.

“Der Schiffer im kleinen Schiffe
Ergreift es mit wildem Weh;
Er schaut nicht die Felsenriffe,
Er schaut nur hinauf in die Höh.

“Ich glaube die Wellen verschlingen,
Am ende Schiffer und Kahn,
Und das hat mit ihrem Singen
Die Lorelei gethan.”

Lady Campion was in the room. He did not venture to look for her, but the sympathy that

exists between like souls told him her thoughts were similar to his. The Marquis and FitzHenry joined them while the song was proceeding. "Many of those German airs are exquisite," said the former. "The words and sentiments are often, however, much better than the setting."

"I prefer genuine English," said FitzHenry. "We can express in our own tongue all the feelings the human soul is capable of, and the language can be rendered as musical as that of any other nation." The song ended, Lady Campion acceded to Wyversley's request for a similar favour. She turned over several pieces of music, but found none to her liking; then tried an Italian and German air, but neither suited her mood; and, at last, for want of better, commenced "The Bridge." She had a strong mellow voice, well adapted to the air, and she threw a great deal of pathos into it as she sang. She appeared unusually affected, especially as she uttered the lines—

"For my soul was hot and restless,
And my life was full of care;
And the burden laid upon me
Seemed greater than I could bear."

CHAPTER XV.

THE next day, after lunch, Avondale went for a solitary walk. He had been for the last twenty-four hours under considerable excitement, and he wished to recover some of his wonted coolness. He was at last fairly embarked on the enterprise, and able associates were with him: They had the talents requisite to lead a great party; had he the tact, as indispensably requisite, to control it and keep it together? He believed so, and he, therefore, considered the really difficult part of the work accomplished. Other members of the Government would fall off as difficulties presented themselves or quarrels arose—it was a mere matter of time; and once the council of chiefs completely formed, the herding the common lot would be easy enough. He saw the edifice crowned with success—he saw himself, the youngest man since the heaven-sent Minister, directing the counsels of the party he had formed

—and the anticipation yielded intoxicating delight.

Other thoughts, too, kept whirling through his brain, and contributed to throw his mind off its usual balance. Clare Campion's figure was ever before him. There was a fascination about her which attracted him, even while he blamed the folly that possessed him. Ambition was to be his goal ; love he had banished—so he assured and reassured himself—yet what was this sensation which would thrill through him at her appearance? On his way back to the Towers he met her, as fate would have it, by the lake. He came rather suddenly upon her. Both were startled at the *rencontre* ; and ere she could recover herself he observed on her face traces of recent tears.

“An unexpected pleasure,” he said, employing the first words that rose to his lips in order to get over the awkwardness. “You are a *solitaire*, like myself.”

“Yes, yes,” she replied, as if speaking to herself, “a *solitaire*—doubly *solitaire*.” Then in louder tones—“I have been taking a last look at the grounds.”

“A last look !”

“Yes, a last look. We leave to-morrow ; perhaps you have not heard so. We have been here almost too long, and my husband is anxious to get back to Campion for a few days’ shooting before the November rains set it.”

“What a pity you cannot stay over the beginning of next week. I hope you have enjoyed your visit so far.”

“Very much—very much. I do not know when I have spent a more agreeable fortnight. The weather, too, has been so very favourable—quite a second summer.”

“Yes, most favourable. But even without the fine weather one could not fail to enjoy one’s self at Egremont, especially amongst the crowd of people who have filled the Towers lately.”

“Especially when one has ample employment to keep the mind from feeding upon useless regrets and from brooding over the past.”

“How sadly you speak. Surely your position prevents sadness or grief ever disturbing the serenity of your lot.”

“Pray don’t ask me—don’t ask me,” she said, in lowest tone. Avondale was standing

close to her. Both were watching the sun as he rapidly sank in the west. "How beautiful it is!" she went on, in the same whispering tone. "See the sun's rays falling on the fountain and converting the drops into pellets of gold, and against the Castle's time-worn turrets, and upon the trees, still thickly covered with foliage; but the leaves are crisp and dry, and with the first wind they will all fall off. Then the prospect will be changed, and clouds will cover the heavens, and the beauty will be gone. So my beautiful dream has vanished—and I have been so happy! Oh! may you never know the bitterness of having every hope blasted in its birth, and of knowing, even as the cup is offered to your parched lips, that it will be cruelly torn away before you can grasp it!"

"Oh, Clare!" began Avondale. She half turned; her arm touched his, and the mischief was done. Avondale felt a shock through every nerve—the quivering which none can feel but once in their life—the quivering which is the visible manifestation of the spirit's agony—the quivering which shakes the strong man as the earth-throbs shake the volcano, and which dis-

places reason from her throne, it may be for the moment, it may be for life. "Clare! Clare!" he breathed rather than spoke, "my darling, I love you—I love you fondly! Forgive me telling you—forgive me—but I cannot restrain myself longer!"

He pressed her again and again to his breast, showering down kisses on her lips and cheeks. She remained passive in his arms, neither accepting nor repelling his caresses, but weeping abundantly.

"Walter, what have you said?" she moaned. "This is madness; you must forbear. Oh! speak no more—it will kill me!—my heart is so weary—how I love you!—yet I must not."

"Say again that you love me, Clare—say it again. I love you fondly, truly! I will ever love you, Clare; I will be faithful to you though I have to wait years."

He spoke with intense eagerness the hot terms of endearment, still holding her, still kissing her. With a great sigh, she extricated herself from him after a time, but she was unable to stand without the support of his encircling arm.

"Oh, Walter! we are both bereft of our

senses. The remembrance of what you have now said will be a clog on your future movements."

"No, no."

"It will be. I ought not to have allowed you to see me alone. I knew what would happen, and yet I wickedly hoped for this meeting. I shall never forgive myself. But my life has been so utterly wretched—a hideous, dreary blank—and the last few months have been so happy. When you left the Towers in August I looked forward to the time when you would return, and I should be once more with you. May God forgive me my sin! I did not think of it as a sin—I did not know my own feelings, but I do know them now. I woke up yesterday to the full reality of the truth. The agony that I have endured since! But it is over now. This must be our parting—our parting for ever."

"Oh no, Clare, not for ever—not for ever. Unsay those words."

"I dare not unsay them, Walter. You will soon cease to think of me as you do now, and I would not have you think then, when your opinion changes, that I have been altogether

wicked. We part now, and you must forget me."

"I cannot."

"You must. I shall try to banish your image; but I cannot now. I shall be able to do so after a time; but till then I should like to think that you have not utterly forgotten me. Will you think of me occasionally for one year, Walter?"

"Aye, Clare, and for life. I will not, though you command me, ever forget you."

"No, Walter; for one year. Even that is a wicked wish; but the human heart is weak, and I cannot instantaneously tear from mine what is so firmly planted in it. I have those lines of yours; I shall keep them for a year and then return them. And now we must separate. I shall enter the Towers by the conservatory—you take the carriage drive. See, the day is over."

She held out her hand. Avondale kissed it passionately. She snatched it from him, and was gone.

Avondale walked slowly back, his mind in a greater chaos than when he had left the Towers three hours earlier. The sun's rays still tinted the

fleecy clouds that hung about the sky, but the darkness was hastening on with that stealthy tread that is unheard, save when the watcher dreads the night. Darkness seemed, too, to have come, he knew not why, over his own prospects; and once more he heard, even more clearly than before, the warning words, "Pray God your affections may be turned towards a proper object. Heaven pity the woman if they are not—and you, too! It will be destruction to her, ruin to you; and may be madness to both."

CHAPTER XVI.

MR. JARDINE had arrived. "The Rubicon is crossed then, Walter?"

"It seems to be so. I hope you don't dread the prospect."

"Oh no—not very much. If I did I should have joined the others."

"Stuart says that most tempting baits have been held out to you. It is evident Maitland sees danger; but why has he needlessly given Exmoor offence?"

"He has been compelled to do so. Rowe and Sloe, however, differing in most matters, agree in cordial hatred of Exmoor. Sloe hates him as being next to the Earl of Wigan, the most typical example of the aristocracy, as it ought to be. Rowe hates him, I scarcely know why—they have had several tourneys, but that alone would scarcely account for it. Rowe, however, is frightfully erratic, and his likes and dislikes

both spring from no settled principle. One could never work with him in Australia; I doubt much if the present Ministry won't find him equally untractable; and if he quarrels with those of almost exactly similar opinions, no wonder that he should do the same with those who differ from him. Here are FitzHenry and the Marquis—both look in much better health than they did towards the end of the Session."

"Hope you have been giving Mr. Jardine a full and perfect report of all proceedings, Avondale," said the Marquis.

"I am this moment come in; but I presume your lordship has saved me the trouble."

"Yes," said Jardine; "the Marquis has told me quite enough to point out how far we have got, and I believe it is some considerable distance—don't you, FitzHenry?"

"The route is certainly much more clearly marked out," replied the lawyer smiling, "than it was some six months ago, when at dinner at your house in town, Mordaunt Tracy—and I fancy myself—recommended Avondale to get into Parliament. With anything like careful

management we cannot fail next Session to turn the flank of the Government, if not altogether to eject them. There is an ominous cry rising already amongst the poor as to the coming winter."

"And there is an equally ominous cry rising in Australia," said Jardine. "The last mail speaks of much discontent on account of the position taken by the Government in respect both to the Supreme Legislatures of New South Wales and Victoria, and to the Crown lands in those two colonies; and private letters to me confirm this. Maitland's views on emigration are not very much appreciated either."

"That single subject will, if well manipulated, afford a pretty heavy indictment," said the Marquis. "It is, too, one of the questions which we have selected as a party cry; so that you, Jardine, have your especial work cut out for you."

"Who takes Ireland?" asked Jardine. "That unfortunate isle is once more in a state of disorder, and it will not be difficult to arraign the Government on that head."

"Who is it, Avondale, will take Ireland?"

inquired the Marquis. "I am ashamed to say that I have really forgotten."

"Hainesbury."

"Hainesbury! That's the man. You remember, Jardine, he gave up the Under Secretaryship of the Foreign Office, because when Garmouth became Premier he was not appointed to the head of it."

"Yes, I remember. He is a good man, at least equal to Bayswater in ability, though, I suppose, without his direct personal weight."

"By the by," said FitzHenry, "it is doubtful if the Government will have an Irish Secretary next Session—in Parliament, I mean. Have you read anything of the Waterbridge Commission, Jardine? It has been sitting more than three weeks. The revelations are astounding, and they seem daily to become worse. Starrett has been convicted of personal bribery—I won't say and also of perjury before the committee, though it looks very like it. Mulgrave—he was heard on Tuesday—has cleared himself, but only by showing that his committee, his agents, his solicitors are arrant rogues and deceivers. I fear, however, Grim Growler is

rather overdoing it. He certainly forgets that he is conducting a judicial inquiry, where the majesty of the law should be upheld. He takes a positive delight in putting witnesses on a mental rack, and so to speak, cudgels the truth out of them, when he cannot extract it by gentler means. All this is doubtless very amusing to outsiders, and it furnishes the newspapers with a means of enlivening the dull season, but it detracts somewhat from most people's ideas of fair treatment, and especially from legal ideas of a judge's demeanour and of forensic urbanity. He has also somewhat capriciously refused one or two of the witnesses their certificates of indemnity; and I fear that if these apply to Queen's Bench, not only would the Court take upon them to give the certificates needed, on the ground that the witnesses had made full disclosures, but also that the Right Honourable Radical, who presides in that Court, would gladly seize the opportunity of bestowing as rough a reprimand on Grim Growler as he has himself bestowed on the most blackguard of the voters."

"I have seen in the Scotch papers but little of the evidence," replied Jardine, "but that little

was quite sufficient to assure me the election would be set aside."

"No doubt of that," said FitzHenry. "I imagine, too, the Attorney-General—whoever may fill that office when the report is presented—will feel bound to prosecute some of the voters, and also Starrett. What the Government will do with Mulgrave is doubtful. He won't voluntarily resign; yet he must, if he is to retain his post, be in Parliament; and they cannot venture to raise him to the Upper House. They might, perhaps, do so if either of the witnesses goes to Queen's Bench for his certificate, and the doings of the Committee should there meet with much animadversion. When are you going, Avondale?"

"The end of next week, or the beginning of the following. I believe I am to be the last—the last examined at Waterbridge. Sir Gregory Gobble has to put in an appearance at Westminster Hall, whither the Commission will adjourn from Waterbridge."

"Well, gentlemen," said the Marquis, "there goes the first bell. I am sorry, FitzHenry, this will be your last dinner with us."

The Countess of Wyversley had likewise come that afternoon—chiefly in order to meet the two sprigs of the Royal Family of Carvada, who were expected on the following Monday.

Lady Campion was very vivacious both at dinner and in the drawing room afterwards, so much so that the Marchioness observed it to Avondale. “They leave to-morrow—rather suddenly; but Sir Hugh has never before made such a long stay. Clare is indeed lively beyond her wont; see how she is bantering Mr. Fitz-Henry. What can be the cause?”

“The fine weather, perhaps,” was Avondale’s reply, but he knew that in reality her cheerfulness and smiles were, like his own, assumed, and that underneath the heart was aching, as was his, too, but not aching hopelessly like hers.

“What a nice man Mr. FitzHenry is!”

“Mr. FitzHenry is very fortunate.”

“I always speak my opinion without flattery. I admire him very much, and so I do Mr. Jardine, though there is a great distinction between them. And I like Mrs. Jardine very much; I am so glad she has accompanied her

husband. By the by, why did you quarrel with Lady Jessie?"

"Because your ladyship commanded me to do so."

"Commanded you, sir! What next? Why was it? The actual reason, if you please."

"Because she yawned at me."

"Poor fellow! what shockingly bad taste! Did your Grace hear that?" to the Duke of Strathclyde.

"No, Lady Wharfedale. What was it?"

"Jessie Frescheville nodded, or yawned, or did something else equally heinous in the midst of Mr. Avondale's highly entertaining converse. Whereat this mirror of chivalry grew highly indignant, would not even take her down to dinner—she complained to me about you, sir—

*'Alas how light a cause can move
Dissension between hearts that love,'*

And carried his revenge so far as to plot and almost accomplish the death of Digby."

"Poor Digby!" said the Duke. "How is he getting on?"

"Very well; but I really have not heard the

last two days. I asked Reginald to see him this morning for me. Did you, Reginald? See Digby, I mean."

"Yes. He is progressing favourably, and so forth. He was slightly uncomfortable—rather tired of lying in bed—and I left him somewhat more uncomfortable. I told him Exmoor had resigned—which annoyed him a little. I suppose because he had not contributed towards it; and that Jessie had separated in tears from a friend of mine—which annoyed him very much more. Then I added as a *morceau* for his private meditation, that Avondale proposed putting up for Leatherton—if Watts should, as daily expected, give up his seat—you know that Digby has designs upon that borough."

"Oh, Reginald," expostulated the Marchioness. "It was quite cruel of you thus to torment."

"Don't find fault, Lady Wharfedale," laughed the Duke, "if everything is fair in war and love, it certainly is in politics. But I must congratulate you, Wyversley. I was not aware that you were such an adept at inflicting torture."

"He has caught it from Mr. Avondale, I have no doubt," suggested Lady Wharfedale.

“Mr. Avondale is a universal genius,” said the Duke. “He gets the credit of everything.”

“Your Grace must take Lady Wharfedale’s compliments *cum grano*,” replied Avondale. “She bountifully distributes equivocal ones, but of others she is very chary, and she never spares one for such a humble slave as myself.”

FitzHenry joined them.

“I have a complaint against your ladyship.”

“Against me, Mr. FitzHenry! You quite frighten me.”

“You compel your visitors to enjoy themselves so thoroughly, that they are loth to quit your hospitable mansion. Going back to London from the Towers is like awakening to the stern realities of every-day life after a dream of fairy-land.”

“I am delighted that your visit has been so pleasant; but the weather has been so favourable.”

“It is not to the weather; it is to the presiding genius that the pleasure has been due. But unfortunately it has come to an end as all pleasant—and, indeed, disagreeable—things do end. Briefs, musty reports, Acts of Parliament,

moth-eaten parchment rolls—a delightful prospect, is it not, my lord?”

“I dare say he finds it delightful enough,” said the Duke, “who is outstripping all his rivals, and before whom the highest prize in his profession is placed, to be taken when it likes him.”

FitzHenry left early next morning. Sir Hugh and Lady Campion about mid-day. Lady Campion had carefully avoided Avondale. She met him in the library a short time before her departure. One fervent, maddening embrace—a lingering clutch of the hand—and she tore herself from him, leaving him—the man of cool head and emotionless nerves, who had steeled himself against the allurements of love—utterly overpowered by his passions.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE Prince Carvada and his brother, Count Suneville, were received with great pomp and magnificence—troops of servants drawn up in array, and all the other etceteras; and a grand dinner took place in the evening, and a ball afterwards. The festivities were kept up some days; they had come for the shooting, and a couple of covers had been secured for their special delectation; but by the end of the week the number of guests had very greatly diminished. Sir Marmaduke and Lady Alton, Ravenshurst, and several others, left on Thursday.

Lady Wharfedale was unfortunately summoned to town on the Friday by the sudden illness of her sister, the wife of the Earl of Carwithen, and Wyversley accompanied her. Lady Carwithen was subject to disease of the heart, and she was now in London for the purpose of consulting the family physician.

Next morning Avondale received the expected notification from Rosse and Taylor that the Commissioners desired him to attend at Water-bridge, and be examined on the following Tuesday. The day's papers, too, brought other intelligence equally interesting. The Marquis read out the first instalments of Maitland's nobility—"Two peers are to be raised a step. Mr. Henry Strickland, the well-known banker, has also accepted a peerage, taking his title from Hunstanton, the new watering place on the Wash, near which he has considerable property; and we understand that the barony of Engaine, now in abeyance, will be revived in favour of Mr. Edgar de Engaine Folliott. It is understood, too, that, supposing the report of the Water-bridge Commissioners be favourable, Mr. Percy Mulgrave will be raised to the Upper House.' I suppose, Exmoor, you could have told us this before?"

"Most of it, I believe, if my lips had not been closed."

"I cannot say I altogether approve of your selections. What has either of them done to deserve the distinction? Hillsborough got his

elevation because he has married the sister of Bayswater; Wenlock his for much the same reason, because by marriage he is connected with several families. Strickland owes his, I presume, partly to his money, partly to his sons-in-law—a man's daughters are frequently a nuisance to him; his are certainly a blessing. There is only one left now, Avondale; you had better go in for her."

"No, thanks, my lord. 'My heart is in the Highlands.'"

"Is it? I am greatly pleased to hear you say so. I congratulate."

"No, no; you mistake me altogether," said Avondale, hastily. "I simply mean that—that—my thoughts are—too much engaged about—other things to dream of falling in love—just at present."

"Begin to dream about it pretty quickly."

"Did your lordship do so at my age? And won't you considerately extend the same advice to the Marquis of Exmoor?"

"You are unlike either of us, Walter. You are one of those beings whose passions, apparent, not existent, because habitually kept in

control, break forward with but the greater mischief and ruin when once loosened from restraint, as the extreme of devastation is caused when a volcano, clad with the snows of ages, wakes from its slumber and pours down its sides first a torrent of liquid ice and snow, and then a stream of molten lava. I have, before this, cautioned you. I take the liberty of doing so again. You do not know yourself. Here you are at six-and-twenty, possessed of the discretion and foresight of the veteran of sixty, but with your discretion and foresight are mingled the temerity and the self-reliance of youth. But one side of your nature is, as yet, developed—think you the other is, therefore, dwarfed? Indeed it is scarcely true that the other side is not developed. What are your ambition and energy but substitutes for the passions with which, at your age, other men's souls thrill. Excuse my preaching, and you, too, Exmoor. But don't you think I am right in what I have said to Avondale?"

"I certainly think so," replied Exmoor. "A young man may be free from the gentler emotions, but, if so, he must be a cynic or a

hermit, whose sympathies have been already cauterized with the red-hot iron of deception—this agony, I trust, Avondale has not experienced. Or he must be a kind of half-formed mortal, in which case, as he is utterly precluded from comprehending and entering into one-half of the influences that affect his fellows, he can never hope to take high rank as a leader.”

“I trust,” said Avondale, with a forced laugh, “that I am neither a Timon nor a *lusus naturæ*, and that, if ‘I am dwelling alone in a world of moon, my soul is not quite a stagnant tide,’ as Poe hath it; and, doubtless, some day all will be changed by the appearance of a ‘fair and gentle Eulalie,’ and so forth. But about these creations. Is it really settled that Mulgrave is to go to the Upper House?”

“It is scarcely politic to ask me that question, Avondale,” replied Exmoor. “It is, however, not positively settled. I suppose I may venture so far to divulge State secrets.”

“No very great secret,” observed Wharfedale. “It is not at all likely that any one would venture to offer him a peerage, while such a damning cloud is still hanging over him. Nor can he

resign his seat. Otherwise he would have a very good opportunity of succeeding Folliott in Lindesse."

"He is rather unfortunately fixed," observed Avondale. "But FitzHenry thinks he has cleared himself. If so, I suppose that Maitland will venture to give him a title, even before the report of the Commissioners is presented."

"Very risky, very risky," said the Marquis. "Mulgrave ought to resign. Maitland dare not meet Parliament without the Irish Secretary in one of the Houses. It seems to me he would run just as much risk in case he should give him a coronet, unless Mulgrave, by some extraordinary concatenation of circumstances, contrives to clear himself from every stain. By the by, Avondale, I have been almost forgetting that this is the last time I shall have an opportunity of seeing you for a week or two. We always spend the Christmas in the country, but we shall be in town by the first week in the New Year. Meanwhile where will you be—in town, or do you purpose going across the country home from Water-bridge?"

"I shall come back to London. I don't ad-

mire Lyddonshire at this time of the year. Mr. Jardine, too, goes to London when he leaves the Towers."

"Very good. You, Exmoor, I think, winter in town also. You will be able to carry on operations unremittingly. I must have a regular report from you, Avondale, once a week at least. I will run up if I am wanted at any time; but that is not very likely. Exmoor, Jardine, FitzHenry, and Bransdon will form a quartette, to whom I should be an incumbrance rather than an aid."

"No, no, Wharfedale," interposed Exmoor. "You are much better fitted than either of us for leader; and Jardine will say the same—here he is—won't you, Jardine?"

"Yes—though I have no idea what you're asking me."

"Wharfedale is disparaging himself, saying that we—you, the Lawyer, Bransdon and myself, who will be in London the next two months, will be able to get on better without than with him. But I assert that no other could presume to contest with him the post of chief."

“I agree with you, most decidedly. But we shall not do much till the New Year opens, and then the Marquis will be with us, disciplining, directing, marshalling his forces for the attack.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AVONDALE left Egremont that afternoon for York. The Sunday he spent in the ancient city, and went on to London by the night express.

He left town by the mid-day train for Water-bridge. He had secured half a first-class carriage to himself, for he was rather tired, and he hoped to go to sleep for an hour or two; but just as the train was starting, a lady was put into the compartment. He was rather annoyed, but as she was closely veiled, he thought she was probably an elderly personage, whose presence would not interfere with his devotions to Somnus. His drowsiness, however, passed away, and he could not forbear glancing furtively at his fellow traveller. The figure seemed familiar to him, but all ladies are much alike when dressed similarly. The dress, too, seemed familiar, but what difference between one dress and another.

They were some fifteen miles from London when the veil was thrown back, and he recognised the features of—Clare Campion. The window between their division and the next—in which there was, fortunately, no one—was up, and he was by her side in an instant—

“Clare, Clare, my darling,” he breathed. But she trembled violently.

“My God, I must be mad. Oh, Walter don’t despise me, don’t despise me.”

“Despise you, Clare! my darling, my love! Oh, Clare, you cannot think how forlorn I have been for the last week. They have congratulated me on my buoyancy and gaiety, but my heart has been aching.”

“Mine has been aching, too, Walter, and aching with a pain that you cannot know. There is no hope, no future before me—nothing but the blackness of misery and the agony of despair. What have I done that such a weight of suffering should be laid upon me?” she groaned, closing her eyes, leaning her head wearily against his shoulder.

He kissed her pale face from which life itself seemed to have fled, and her bloodless lips,—

“Speak not thus, Clare,” he prayed huskily. “I love you, dearest ; love you intensely.”

The tears that burst from his eyes and fell on her forehead revived her. “I know, I feel you love me, Walter, but you ought not ; and I love you, but I ought not. I trusted when I left you the other day that I should be strong enough to endure my own torture, and never to see you again ; but I am very weak. I came up to see Lady Carwithen—she is much better now—and have stayed with Alice (Lady Wharfedale). She had a letter from her husband on Saturday, saying you would be going to Waterbridge by this train. I went from Wharfedale House this morning, intending to return home, but on my way to the station a sudden madness came over me. I could not help myself. I would not take a ticket at King’s Cross ; but I came here instead, prompted by the insane resolve to see you.”

“My darling, how can I thank you. Your image has not been absent from me one minute. Clare, dear Clare.”

“I have thought of you by day, dreamed of you by night, Walter, though all the while I

knew how wicked it was. But I could not help myself. For more than ten years I have not known what it was to be happy. When I was a girl, I was bright, and gay, and joyful, though I was poor, for my father had but a small income. Then I married, and all people congratulated me, and I have since had wealth and luxuries—all that men and women long for, Walter—but I have had no companionship, no communion with kindred souls. The world was a blank till—till—you, Walter, crossed my path. Then I felt happy again, and my heart grew light as it was years ago. I could not imagine the reason, Walter; and indeed I was afraid to inquire—I was afraid the cloud and the gloom would return. But I did not suspect that you were the cause, Walter—indeed I did not. Do not think me altogether abandoned.”

“Clare, my darling, do not, I beseech you, do not accuse yourself. Accuse me; it was I that forced the confession from you, though you avoided me.”

“I met you several times towards the end of the season, when everybody was speaking of you, and my sorrows vanished, and the burden upon

me grew lighter when you spoke to me, but I could not see my danger, even though my heart would beat the faster when you approached. I met you afterwards at Egremond. What a fortnight of joy that was to me! Would to God I had died at its close! Those few days I lived only in the present—I remembered no past, I thought of no future. The days were finer, and the sky was clearer, and the country was more lovely than they had ever been before. I lived for I loved, and I grew young again, so Alice told me. The colour came once more to my cheeks, but it was chiefly there when you spoke; and my voice recovered somewhat of its magic when you listened; but I would not see my danger. I did see it and yet I would not, for did ever a dying traveller put away from him a life-giving draught? And you had restored life to my spirit—could I immediately crush it out?”

“Clare, what can I say to you? You speak so sadly and mournfully—you pain me more than I can express. I love you, Clare, love you, love you.”

“Then, Walter, we were both at the Towers again. But I need not go on. I have been

miserably sinful ; but why were you thrown in my way ? Why does God lay upon us such a burden of wretchedness, and then tempt us ? Why am I shut out for ever from happiness ; for ever, Walter. Would I were dead ! ”

“ Hush, hush, Clare ! I will be true to you ; I will, Clare.”

“ No, no, Walter, it must not be. Truth to me would be unfaithfulness to yourself. There is a great gulf between us which could be crossed in only one way, and that way would be destruction to me, ruin to yourself. I am not so overwhelmed by my own sorrow as to be willing to blast your prospects in order to lighten it. It has been a temporary madness which has overpowered me to-day ; but I am more content now that I have seen you. I shall get out at Hatton Junction, and go back to London. We shall part for the last time on this earth. I shall ever be thinking of you while I live. May your lot be crowned with glory, may every blessing attend you ! I pray you not to forget me for a few short months, and I hope you will now and then, even afterwards, bestow a thought on me.”

“ I will not forget you, Clare ; I will not forget you ; I cannot.”

“ You will and must. With all men, and especially with you, love is a subordinate passion, with all women, and especially with me, for you it is a vehement agony which cannot be quenched. But please think of me sometimes while I live, and when you are married and I am dead, ask your wife also to offer a prayer for the soul of her erring sister who loved you so madly.”

Avondale vowed that his love could never change, but she gently checked his protestations, and they attempted, not very successfully, to talk of other matters. He proposed to accompany her back to town, but she would not allow him.

“ We part for ever, Walter. I have command over myself, and I can now say good bye. Weakness might seize on me if I consented to your returning with me to town.”

The train slackened speed as they approached Hatton.

“ One single kiss more, Walter,” she asked.

A long, long, long press, such as only two

young lives can give, just ere fate raises between them the wall of eternal separation. She almost fainted as the train stopped, but recovered herself by a strong effort. The return train was due in fifteen minutes, while Avondale, who had changed carriages, had to wait half an hour. He was very anxious about her returning alone, but she was quite certain she should do well enough.

"I shall stay at the Great Northern Hotel to-night, and go on to-morrow morning."

While pacing the platform Avondale was surprised to see Wyversley.

"Will you allow Wyversley to accompany you?"

"Oh, no; he would recognise me."

"He would not; I did not, Clare, do you suppose any one else could? Besides, it might hereafter be better if he did so."

She saw the force of the latter argument, and at length consented. Avondale left her to speak to Wyversley.

"Did not expect to see me here, I suppose, Walter. Lady Wharfedale mentioned yesterday you were going to Waterbridge to-day. I forgot to ask her by what train; indeed, I did not re-

solve to run down till this morning, when a sudden fancy seized me to inspect the commission whose proceedings are attracting so much attention just now. I took this train as the most likely to contain you, but I did not see you get in."

"I fear I have a favour to ask you. A friend of mine is going to town. She is going to the Great Northern Hotel to-night. She has no one with her. Will you accompany her? Excuse my making such an unconscionable request."

Wyversley, not a little astonished, replied—

"Yes."

"And I should be glad if you would take the utmost care not to breathe a word about the circumstance to any one."

Wyversley, of course, assented. He was considerably mystified, and racked his brain to guess who the lady might be, but he could form no satisfactory conclusion, though if he had not left Lady Campion with the Marchioness he would have been inclined to suspect her, and therefore dismissed all speculation, and discharged to the best of his ability the confidence placed in him. Avondale had to introduced her as "Mrs. Symonds;" that was the extent of his informa-

tion. He saw her safely to the Hotel, but she was very quiet and taciturn, acknowledging his attention only by monosyllables; and the remainder of the evening he spent with Lady Wharfedale. Often afterwards he recurred to the incident, but he could get no clue to the mystery. His friend never in any way alluded to it; and he, of course, did not venture to question him upon it. So it continued a puzzle, and, indeed, to Wyversley, it ever continued such.

AVONDALE

OF

AVONDALE.

A POLITICAL ROMANCE.

IN THREE VOLS.

BY

UTTERE BARRE.

I have a lever, had I fulcrum too,
The earth from dullest sloth should be uplift.

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BOOK V.



FLORENCE VRYNNE.

FLORENCE VRYNNE.

CHAPTER I.

THE proceedings of the Waterbridge commission had indeed been, as Wyversley said, attracting attention. Mr. Irving, Captain Wright, Mr. Radford, and Mr. Benton had entered with the greatest gusto into the necessary preliminary arrangements for making the exposure complete and damning. Messrs. Rosse and Taylor had never prepared a case for counsel more carefully than they now worked up the evidence.

The Commissioners showed themselves well up to their work. They spared none, gentle or simple. They probed to the core the moral plague-spots of the town. Day after day the investigation went on, and men grew absolutely terrified at the corruption laid bare, at the mass of pollution heaped up, dreading how far the con-

tamination might have spread among other towns. It seemed impossible to credit that any section of the English people could have sunk into such a depth of degradation. Voters confessed, and almost gloried in, selling their votes at every election that had come off during their memory, this time to a Tory, next to a Radical, the time after to both. Indeed, this latter was the favourite mode of procedure. Personification, too, was a common and openly recognised ruse; and vote early, vote often, was carried out as far as practicable. Common honesty had left them; the voice of conscience never spoke; there was no regard for the sentiments on which depends the very existence of society; "*perfidia plus quam Punica, nihil veri, nihil sancti, nullus Deum metus, nullum jus jurandum, nulla religio.*"

But, while all the world marvelled, the inhabitants of Waterbridge made light of the matter, and pursued their avocations with accustomed serenity. They amused themselves with nicknaming the Commissioners, "The World, the Flesh, and the Devil." The President, Coste, an urbane and dignified Q.C., who had

much difficulty in restraining within due bounds the exuberant feelings of the third member of the trio, was "the World." "The Flesh" was Warmfield, the youngest of them; a man somewhat nice in dress, who was never without a flower in his buttonhole, which he now and again applied to his nose, as if the very atmosphere were reeking with material, as it was with moral, filth and abominations.

Grim Growler was "the Devil," and the epithet was not unaptly applied. Him alone of the three the witnesses dreaded. Woe betided the unfortunate individual whom Mr. Growler suspected of prevarication.

Vain the assertions that every fact had been made known; vain a reference to their oath—

"You have been acknowledging a whole heap of lies, you have been pleading guilty to years of knavery and cheating," was thundered out, "would you persuade us that any oath now would bind you, or anything less than the fear of a prosecution for perjury? The truth, the whole truth, you—you—"

"Gently, Mr. Growler," the President would

interpose; “the truth, sir, if you please, and consider carefully your position;” while Grim Growler would conclude his sentence in an under tone, “you damned scoundrel! the whole pack of you ought to be pitched into the mud of your own pestiferous stream.”

Vain were protestations of innocence—“Have you ever voted at an election? Then that is presumption against you. Have you ever sat on a committee? Then that is scarcely less than positive proof.” Vain were appeals for mercy—“We have nothing to do with mercy, that is a matter for the Attorney-General’s consideration. We have only to find out who are the most thorough scamps, and the most unmitigated villains in Waterbridge—and it is rather a difficult duty;” and then, in a whisper to his junior colleague—“Why, Warmfield, if the devil himself were to send here a dozen of his choicest imps, they would appear angels of purity beside these reprobates.”

Vain was it for any to stand upon professional privileges. “No profession ever yet threw its protecting mantle over duplicity and fraud;”

and, when two such gentlemen refused to answer they were, despite the objections raised by a Sergeant-at-Law and two juniors, whom they had telegraphed for to defend them, hurried off for two months to the county gaol, the sentence being afterwards affirmed by the full Court of Queen's Bench.

Mr. Growler doubtless overstepped the liberty of examination allowed him, and occasionally permitted his righteous indignation to overpower him, and to convert him from a judge into an inquisitor. But we may fairly pardon him, just as we pardon the skilful surgeon, though his handling may not be as delicate as that of the humbug, the fine ladies' medical attendant, when he has excised the cancer, or the ulcer, that was eating into our vitals. It is doubtful if any man less resolute, less determined, less harsh, would have been a match for the practised bribers and bribees of Waterbridge. Twice had committees of the House of Commons heard petitions in respect of its elections, but on neither occasion could they report "any circumstances calling for the special and active interference of the House."

Even the Committee in the preceding August, though they had discovered the existence of bribery, had not the faintest idea of the nature of the revelations that were now made.

Needless to detail minutely the evidence—how, not alone Mr. Broadcloth, but also Mr. Tartwine, the ropemaker, Mr. Crockery, the earthenware man, Mr. Quinine, the chemist, Messrs. Shovell and Tongs, the ironmongers, Mr. Bridles, the saddler, Messrs. Gigge and Clarence, the carriage builders, and many others, saved up their unpaid accounts from one election to another, adding thereto any items that might—or might not—have been forgotten in the hurry of making them out before. How, like Mr. Figgs, Mr. Candy, the confectioner, and Mr. Dolly, the toyman, found sovereigns in out-of-the-way corners; and, like Mr. Fleshman, Mr. Oatmeal, the miller, sold to Mr. What's-his-name, flour at 70s. a quarter, while his partner, Mr. Barleycake, the baker, bought it of him again at 25s. a sack—how, once, when no contest could be otherwise got up, Skinner, the Radical lawyer, Grabmuny, the Tory one (they were not partners then), and

Cheatem Bothe, the Liberal ditto, guaranteed the expenses of Sir Timothy Sykes, the London Alderman, and subscribed £500 each for that purpose, and afterwards let the Alderman in for £6,000, besides clearing nearly the same sum out of the other two candidates—how the canvassers pocketed half the money given them by the agents to carry on their special work, the agents diddled the solicitors, and these latter hocused their accounts to make them presentable to their clients, and how no one canvasser, agent, solicitor, ever returned a farthing that once came into their fingers—how Percy Mulgrave bitterly complained of the cruel treatment he had experienced from those into whose hands he had fallen, and that his disbursements, instead of being as promised, under £2,000, had come up to £6,000 (which sum, by the by, being £4,000 more than his wife had allowed, would compel him to live for the next two years on a very scant allowance of pocket money to make up the deficiency)—how Starrett, when at length driven into a corner after much fighting, confessed that he had known at least £20,000 illegally spent on different occa-

sions ; that he did not believe any election within the last half century had been pure ; that the electors generally, and the attorneys in particular, were sharper rogues, and more experienced at their work than even he had imagined, and had now diddled him out of £5,000 above what he had intended to spend.

One solitary circumstance may be noted. The day on which Avondale arrived, Sandy Mac Swindle had made a full disclosure. On an earlier day, when before the Commissioners, he had so fenced and equivocated that they had dismissed him. They now gave him a last opportunity of obtaining a certificate ; and he, following the example set by his superiors, disburdened his conscience in such a way as not only to put the final touches to the hideous spectre of wickedness that had already been carved out, but also to compromise our hero. He declared that he had called on Mr. Avondale on the occasion of his second visit to Waterbridge, that Mr. Avondale, knowing his influence among the lowest class, had asked his assistance in secret and apart from his own committee ; that they would have come to an arrange-

ment had not the sum of £1,000 which he asked, been too much, and that Mr. Avondale offered him £500, and finally getting angry because he would not take less than £1,000, had threatened to kick him out of the room.

The tale was true in part. The landlord confirmed the visit, and the hearing of angry words. Mr. Taylor, too, could not deny this, for he entered the hotel as MacSwindle was leaving, and blamed Avondale for giving him an interview at all. Taylor questioned him closely, but he adhered to the declaration, and the lawyer could only hope that Avondale would be able to meet the charge. When Avondale appeared next morning he asked the Commissioners to call Mac Swindle, and re-examine him—his statement did not vary. Mulgrave was present. To him Avondale turned—

“Do you, Mr. Mulgrave, who have had some experience of this fellow, believe his story?”

“Not a word of it, sir, if you deny it.”

“Thank you, very much. Such an expression of opinion from you would suffice to clear me in the eyes of honest men. Mr. President, will

you kindly call Henry Anson, before I give evidence?"

Taylor gave Avondale a look which told him he could guess what was coming, and MacSwindle shifted uneasily. Anson was waiter at the "Royal George."

"I don't know what we are to ask you, Anson—can you throw any light on this?" said Mr. Coste.

"Yes, sir. I went up to Mr. Avondale, and told him that MacSwindle wanted to see him. Mr. Avondale would not see him at first, but after a minute he asked me if there were any other way, besides through the sitting room, into the next room. As luck would have it there is, sir—through the dressing room. So Mr. Avondale told me to send up MacSwindle, who had asked very particularly if any one was with Mr. Avondale, and to go up myself into the bedroom and hear what he had to say. I was not many moments getting there, and 'twas Mac Swindle who, after beating about the bush, wanted Mr. Avondale to engage him for £1,000 to look after the poorer voters. Mr. Avondale directed him

to speak to Mr. Rosse about it; and then he lowered his terms, and offered to do it for £500, and £100 for himself. And he went on that Mr. Rosse and Mr. Taylor did not know anything about elections, and would lose Mr. Avondale the place, when the gentleman jumped up and threatened to kick him down stairs. That's the whole of the matter, as true as I am standing here, your Honour. But I forgot," added the witness, with a merry twinkle of the eye, "that MacSwindle gave his opinions pretty free about some of the gentlemen. Would it be proper for me to repeat it?"

"Of course it would," replied Grim Growler—"go on, sir."

"He said that Skinner and Grabmuny were rogues, regular out and outers, and were nicely plundering Mr. Mulgrave, who was a good sort of man, but a little bit weak in the upper stories."

Roars of laughter, at Mulgrave's expense, interrupted the witness; when they had subsided, the President directed him to continue.

"He said Mr. Mulgrave's working committee were all a pack of scamps, and were in co. with

Skinner and Grabmuny to get all the tin they could out of him—”

“Stop,” exclaimed Grim Growler, “this private opinion of Mr. MacSwindle is invaluable. I must read it to the committee.” He did so slowly and with great emphasis, and, the court being crowded to hear Avondale’s examination, most of them were present. “And Mr. MacSwindle said the committee were scamps. Well, he certainly ought to know. Did he mention any names in particular?”

“No, sir—that is only one or two. He said Mr. Crockery would sell his soul for a sovereign, that the Town Council always heaped theirs together, and put them up for a lump sum, and that Mr. Figgs never had no soul at all—only a pound weight three ounces short. He considered Oatmeal and Barleycake uncommon slippery—you could never be sure of ’em if you did not see them up to the poll booth, just as you ain’t sure of getting good wheat flour from ’em if you don’t go into the mill and stand by the hopper and watch that they don’t put peas or beans in; and old Dr. Smiler Humbug were just as uncertain—

he might vote if you didn't pay him beforehand, just like his old mare hobbles on, shying every yard or two, when she is hungry, but as soon as he fingers the coppers he pulls short up, and, perhaps, turns back, like the mare does when she's had a meal, if some other bait isn't held afore his nose to tempt him on."

Loud laughter stopped the witness for two or three minutes; and the unfortunate personages thus particularised, who happened to be amongst the listeners, muttered imprecations deep, if not loud, on Anson's garrulousness. He took breath, bestowed a condescending nod on Starrett, and continued—

"MacSwindle thought that Mr. Starrett must be a great deal softer than Mr. Mulgrave, for putting up here when he knew the people so well, and especially for employing Cheatem Bothe as his lawyer. Mr. Starrett is a cute customer, and have been long engaged in the bribery line, and still longer in the butter business, which they says wants just as good wits as 'tother trade; but he couldn't miss being took in by Cheatem Bothe, and had no

chance of coming round him at all, for only one could do that, and he was old Harry himself—they was MacSwindle's exact words, your Honours."

Mr. Coste had hitherto maintained his dignity pretty well, but the rich tone of humour with which the witness spoke, and the malicious twinkle in his eyes, combined with Starrett's crestfallen appearance and Cheatem Bothe's assumption of anger, completely upset his gravity. Silence being at length restored, he observed—

"I hope, Anson, you are speaking the literal truth—remember you are on your oath."

"Yes, sir, and I kissed the book, too. MacSwindle said that Mr. Thompson, the brewer, when he were going to tell a lie never kissed the book, and so saved his conscience; but that Mr. Broadcloth wern't up to the dodge, and so had to get absolution at next Sunday's love-feast from the Methodist parson, though the parson wouldn't give absolution till he had had a good dinner at Mr. Broadcloth's first. And that Mr. Chairman is all save"—as he caught sight of Everett,

the defeated Conservative candidate — “that MacSwindle begged Mr. Avondale wouldn’t send any bad money going, like Mr. Everett did at last election, when the man came down ’spress from London from the big solicitors, who wrote Mr. Everett’s address for him, ’cause he hadn’t brains to do it himself, and brought a thousand bran-new Queen’s likenesses for distribution, but half of them were counterfeits. MacSwindle said this were too bad, for a man when he is dead drunk must trust to your fair play, and can’t tell whether you are fobbing him off with a bit of brass or a real shiner, and I agree it were a nasty trick, your Honours, and most people think the same. Our motto is—‘act on the square, and don’t deceive your neighbour in that way, and when you lies or cheats do it honourable;’ because, sir, that is straightforward. Nobody at Waterbridge believes anybody else, but for a gentleman like Mr. Everett to buy a poor man’s soul for a bad Victoria, is that mean as nobody would do but a ’lection attorney, who hadn’t seen the bottom of a pint cup or the inside of a round of beef for the last twelvemonths.”

“Are these statements correct, Mr. Avondale?” asked the President.

“I believe so, sir. I have forgotten most of MacSwindle’s conversation, but I know that I talked with him for some time in order to acquire a little knowledge of the character of some of the persons with whom I was likely to come into contact, and that his descriptions greatly amused me.”

Avondale’s examination lasted some two hours. The Commission were predisposed towards him, and, at the close, congratulated him on the way in which he had conducted himself. They then said that they had finished their labours at Waterbridge, and would be prepared next morning to grant certificates to such persons as, in their opinion, deserved them.

Mulgrave and Taylor dined with Avondale. The former, poor man, was thoroughly disgusted with the conduct of his agents. He felt acutely the degradation the election had brought upon himself, and was much gratified to hear the favourable opinion put forth by FitzHenry. Taylor left early, and Mulgrave and Avondale

spent the evening together. The conversation passed from subject to subject, and Avondale discovered that his companion possessed a much wider acquaintance with things generally than he had hitherto given him credit for. He was a scholar—he had graduated high at Oxford—he was well-read in history and literature; he had a cultivated taste for poetry and art; he was versed in the less abstruse problems of metaphysics and ontology; he had a considerable acquaintance with social theories; in a word, he was an educated gentleman. Whether he was a statesman, was altogether a different matter. They parted with mutual expressions of good will.

“I trust you will soon be in the House, Mr. Avondale. Our views, though somewhat discordant, are not directly opposed, and it may easily be that time’s wheel will bring us together under, if not in, the same Government. You have started well, very well. Your defeat here will be the gain of a loss. You have, I understand, good friends. I wish you success; and I hope that the acquaintance we have thus com-

menced will not be broken off, and I shall have the pleasure of seeing you in town, and of introducing you to my wife.”

Next morning Mr. Broadcloth’s certificate and those of five others were refused, on the ground that they had not made a full disclosure. In Broadcloth’s case the refusal was somewhat harsh, and was due entirely to Grim Growler’s persistency. The unfortunate bill which he had presented to Avondale was the cause. This had predisposed the Commission against him ; then he had tried to explain it away, and, getting confused, appeared to be prevaricating; and, finally, he attempted to shield some of the persons concerned in the last election. The lawyers also received their certificates, to the intense chagrin of Grim Growler, who could not, however, allege any reason, valid in law, for withholding them. The lawyers had foreseen the coming storm, and had, therefore, secured themselves against it, by making a clean breast of all the transactions. Grabmuny was the only one who hesitated, and was, in consequence, told to sit down ; but next day, having seen meanwhile how Cheatem

Bothe comported himself, he humbly submitted to the Commissioners that he had refreshed his memory and that he could, therefore, now distinctly recollect many occurrences which, twenty-four hours earlier, had utterly passed from his mind.

This ceremony over, Mr. Coste tendered, in the name of himself and colleagues, his most sincere thanks to Messrs. Rosse and Taylor for the very great assistance they had afforded, saying, also, that they were under scarcely less obligation to Mr. Avondale's committee, not one of whom had been shown to have been in any way connected with the corrupt practices. He spoke in highest terms of Avondale's conduct throughout the election, but upon the other three candidates he made no remark, leaving them to chew the cud of their own reflections.

We may as well here slightly anticipate events. On the opening of the next Hilary term, an application was made, as FitzHenry had expected, to the Queen's Bench to grant the certificate the Commissioners had refused Mr. Broadcloth; and what he did not expect, he was selected to make

that application. It is needless to say that he, nevertheless, discharged his duty to the best of his ability, and as the statute under which the Commission was appointed was somewhat ambiguous, and it might be fairly construed as giving them less discretion than they had assumed in the refusing of certificates, he gained his point. Following on this decision came the elevation of Mr. Percy Mulgrave to the peerage, under the style of Baron Kilcoe, a title taken from a small hill in county Cork, overlooking Roaring Water Bay, near which he had inherited, in right of his mother, a few acres of barren land. His wife, anxious to exchange her pinchbeck title for a genuine one, had schemed and plotted to effect her purposes. She exercised great influence over her own set, and the Government could not afford to lose that influence by compelling Mulgrave to resign; neither could they first open Parliament without a Secretary for Ireland present at it. They, therefore, fortifying themselves with the opinions as to Mulgrave's conduct, expressed both by the Commissioners and by the Court of Queen's Bench, and reiterated by FitzHenry him-

self in his application, pitchforked him into the House of Lords.

Avondale remained at Waterbridge a day or two. He called on his chief supporters to return them his thanks for their aid. They were pleased to see him, and got up an impromptu dinner in his honour before he left. His health, proposed by Mr. Radford in a speech of wonderful length, was drunk with great applause. Radford expressed himself well satisfied with the revelations which the Commission had elicited, though he was utterly ashamed of the morality of some of his fellow townsmen. It, however, afforded him some consolation to know, that a very respectable minority of the voters had kept their hands from the contamination of illgotten gain, and that the Commission had even addressed a few words of approval and commendation to their particular party. Avondale, in responding, deplored the corrupt state of the borough, but he reminded those present that though it had fairly carried off the palm of wickedness, yet it had many competitors who ran it close in the race. Other towns could easily be pointed out where an investiga-

tion as rigorous and unsparing would lead to disclosures equally degrading; and he trusted the day was not far distant when, if people could not be educated to the point of refusing, they should be deterred from accepting a bribe; when the law could draw no distinction between the payment of money to influence a man's vote and the payment of money to tempt him to commit a felony; when the being in any way concerned in corrupt practices should stamp a man, if not for life at least for years, with infamy and blot his name from the roll of citizens. Mr. Rosse, Captain Wright, Irving, and others, spoke; and although not exactly charmed with the scrutiny, they did not pretend to regret its results.

Before they separated they called in Henry Anson, congratulated him on the excellent way in which he had rendered MacSwindle's descriptions, and drank long life to him.

And now, dear Waterbridge, adieu. Sink back to thy obscurity in the marshes; settle down amidst thy dirt and slime, thy mire and filth; hug to thy breast the notoriety thou hast gained;

and pray that when the last trump shall sound, it
may wake thee and thine, still placidly slumbering
'neath a thick layer of mud. Dear Waterbridge,
good bye.

CHAPTER II.

AVONDALE had before him two months of comparative leisure. Till the beginning of the New Year little could be done in the way of organising or even getting together a party ; so far he had proceeded well ; he must be content to let events take care of themselves till after the Christmas festivities. But at no time could he remain absolutely idle, he was nervously eager for occupation ; his mind if employed upon nothing else would feed upon itself. And now, less than ever, was it possible for him to rest while the hours and days crept by.

Love—passion rather—for Clare Campion devoured him ; he was compelled to find labour of some kind, if only to prevent his thoughts ever recurring to her. Often was the madness strong upon him ; often was he at the point of commencing a correspondence with her ; often did the longing, almost irresistible, seize him of rushing

to her and begging her to flee with him. Fortunate, most fortunate was it, for him, for both, that he was not like Wyversley, a man of ample wealth and unfettered with relations; or there would have been a scandal—a divorce—a couple hidden midst the Italian lakes or in the Grecian Archipelago, loving wildly for months, probably hating afterwards for a lifetime—the fair tablet on which was lightly traced the career of one of them blurred, blotted, fractured, so that no toil, no genius, might be able to restore its pristine beauty.

His time he filled up as best he could with literary work. He began a poem, a novel, a drama all at once. With these he mingled a heterogeneous mass of historical reading, &c., though he did—that is he completed—nothing, but the occupation relieved his mind, and by degrees the torrent of excitement calmed down.

One good effect his acquaintance with Lady Champion had produced, though perhaps most will think such a benefit purchased too dearly—it had completely changed the current of his feelings with regard to Miss Dawson. He had heard, just

before leaving Egremond, with little emotion though with not a little soreness, of her impending marriage with Killarney; he heard, with even less feeling, about a fortnight after returning to town from Waterbridge, that the marriage would be, owing to the state of her health, put off till the next summer, and that she would spend the three winter months in the South of France. He was somewhat surprised, because she had a strong constitution, without the slightest tendency to consumption or chest complaints.

The time, however, though it might occasionally lag, did not hang heavily on his hands. The members of both sides of the house were taking sweet counsel with their constituents. Wonderful, according to these gentlemen, had been their own doings during the past session. No matter to which party they belonged, Conservative or Liberal, Tory or Radical, they had invariably supported the good measures and opposed the bad ones, and their exertions had been just as invariably successful. It was occasionally rather amusing, when the same borough had re-

turned an element from each end of the social battery, to see how the two opposing poles would at the annual banquet unite and give forth the same spark—to see how in the Town Hall of Kakodyle, that watering-place so famed for the sweet odour arising from its sulphur springs, the Honourable Grosvenor de la Terriere, who owned the land on which the spa was situated, and Alderman Spinks, locally known as Glasshouse Joe, who made the bottles in which the water was exported, would reciprocate and coo like gentle doves, and assure the audience that though they might differ on such minor points as the need of a National Church or an Upper House, of an Army or a Navy, their sentiments were at bottom not diverse.

The proceedings of some members of the Cabinet afforded not a little ground for animadversion. Bayndon had taken Exmoor's post, and had informed the people of Grantham that nobody before him had been qualified to manage such a department as the Navy, that he should be able to cut down the expenses one half (loud cheers), to get rid of one-third of the clerks (faint cheers);

who were all connected with the bloated aristocracy (vociferous cheers), and to shut up two of the dockyards, and to discharge the hands—very faint cheers, which finally degenerated into a growl of disapprobation, and a trades-unionist present gave vent to the general feeling by proposing, amidst yells of applause, that instead of closing any of the yards, the Government should open others, and build plenty of ships, which would be wanted at some future time, if not now, and if never wanted it would be all the same—the lazy nobs and swells who were enriched by the labour and blood of the poor, could very well spare some of the earnings, to which they had properly no right, in order to help the poor when trade was so bad.

Bayndon might be pardoned his eccentricities—he knew no better, he was fresh to his work, had only just got into decent society, and had been taken on solely because of his lavish promises of retrenchment. If he had boasted so frightfully before his elevation, it was not likely that he could undergo any wonderful transformation when only that had occurred.

But the eccentricities of Blocke Head and Sloe were inexcusable. The former, however, poor man, was a mistake—that is the best method of describing him. He might have done “monstrous well” as steward of some big house where the servants were old retainers, and where he would never have been called upon for an explanation of any of his arrangements, or as head master of a free school, where the boys were not troublesome, or even as chief clerk in a department, the only business of which was to copy letters and docket receipts—provided that is the subordinate clerks were mild and modest, and the principals unexact and considerate, and the letters needed no deciphering and the receipts came in due order and, and, nothing ever occurred to upset his equilibrium. But as a Minister he was a mistake, and as a Minister addressing a turbulent set of electors he was, if possible, an even greater mistake. He lost his calmness, his wits, his memory, made random shots at questions he did not understand, gave absurd answers to those which he did, and involved himself in difficulties ; he compromised

the Government; and extricated himself and them from the toils in which his nervousness had wrapped around them by dint of lengthy correspondence in the local journals.

Mr. Blocke Head's laches arose from softness of that prominent part of the body from which he derived his name; Mr. Jonathan Sloe's arose from his one-sided disposition, which could never permit him to judge an opponent fairly, and from constitutional glibness of speech which, not infrequently betrayed him into coarseness of language. Ability to curb his tongue and to restrain the free expression of the emotions agitating him had not been one of his characteristics, nor had he acquired it with the acquisition of official robes. In September he had at Diddleham spoken in a most unpolitic manner of various members of Parliament; he now at Shodditon repeated the error. He expended his great oratorical strength in mere abuse, urged on doubtless by the dread spectre of opposition, which the Cabinet felt rather than saw, taking form and shape against the beginning of the next session.

CHAPTER III.

FROM pure desire for excitement, and as a refuge from burning thoughts, Avondale occasionally went to Clair Street. Indeed, he spent more of his evenings at the gaming saloon than was altogether advisable. Wyversley, Brayclift, Stanley Carlton, Talbot, Stansville, and many others were often there, and they were glad to welcome Avondale, who was good at cards as at billiards, and who could joke with the best, though he would not make the acquaintance of the blackleg. He tried hard, very hard, to rescue Brayclift from the set that were devouring him, but he could not. The young nobleman thanked him sincerely for his kind intentions, and would gladly, at any time, spend an hour or two with him; but he was already deeply involved, he was deficient in the moral courage requisite to extricate himself, he was not without the gamester's hope that luck

would change ; and he plunged on, till after next year's Derby when the crash came ; the furniture in the town house was every bit and scrap sold, down to the kitchen towels, the fireirons, the crockery, and the jam pots. Half the country estates were alienated, and the remainder heavily mortgaged ; the family seat was let to a Birmingham button maker ; and the Marquis himself, a new spirit created in him, as not unseldom happens, by his misfortunes, threw off his title and rank and went to Australia as manager of one of Mr. Jardine's estates.

Wyversley, too, was in town, and he wasted much of his leisure at Lilybank. Avondale experienced no difficulty in getting him to give the congé to the turfites, who had already assisted him to run through £100,000, for in this he was assisted by Auricoma ; but the persuading him to separate himself from her was a totally different matter, for in this he was opposed by Auricoma. He himself went not seldom to Lilybank, now seeing her and Wyversley alone, now the house filled with a giddy crowd of young life. But most of his visits gave him a fit of

the blues, not on account of the folly or misery of human nature, not on account of the dissipation that he observed, or of the wealth that was being squandered ; of these matters he took a very philosophic view, considering all men when arrived at years of discretion fully competent to judge of their own happiness or welfare for themselves ; but because he felt each time a more genuine sympathy for Auricoma. She was acting fairly and honourably towards Wyversley who would, with little hesitation and less persuasion, have married her, had she chosen to ask it ; but she left him to decide for himself. She brought no influence to bear, she used no blandishments, she simply loved him with the love of a strong-minded and beautiful woman, who had no other stay or hope ; and who can estimate the intensity of such a passion ? She was, however, attempting to prepare herself for the position his wife should fill. Grace, tact, taste, Nature had given her. She sang and played well ; French Wyversley had already taught her, and she was rapidly beating him at Italian, and was ever delighted when Avondale would give her a

few minutes' conversation in that language. Avondale was in the greatest perplexity. He pitied truly and sincerely the poor girl; he was equally concerned for his friend who was drifting on to what society would consider destruction. He did not venture to speak to the Countess about it, for he was persuaded that such a course would but produce strife between mother and son. He gave Exmoor a few hints, and was not much surprised to find that he was pretty well acquainted with the matter. They agreed, however, to keep Wyversley as far as possible out of harm's way by finding him employment in canvassing members whose votes they wished to secure.

He also seized every pretence of taking Wyversley to the Jardines, and of throwing him in the way of Mary Jardine; and his exertions succeeded so admirably that the young lady lost her heart, even if she did not secure one in return. She was sprightly, vivacious, nonchalant, and relying on these qualities, she bantered the Earl upon his becoming a political adventurer, laughed at the change that had come over his

character, in that he was now active and ambitious who had been indolent and dreamy, quizzed him on his disregard of female wiles, and ended by falling in love with him herself, as all young ladies who deem themselves proof against the tender feeling, do fall in love, desperately in love, before they are aware of the dangerous proximity of the youthful son of Ares and Aphrodite.

CHAPTER IV.

CHRISTMAS drew on. No other batch of peers had yet been created, no further defection from the Ministerial ranks had taken place. FitzHenry, Exmoor, Jardine, and Avondale had been dining at the house of the first, and were running over their prospects on the last occasion of meeting before dispersing for the Christmas vacation.

“Great nuisance,” said FitzHenry, “that I have to plead Broadcloth’s case for him next term. I believe he has the law on his side, and if so, any one else would have done as well.”

“My dear sir,” exclaimed Jardine in pretended astonishment, “you really don’t mean to say that lawyers have, in professional matters, any conscience at all. I always thought you considered yourself, when in court, as so many machines, receiving facts and statements at one extremity and turning them out at the other duly

dressed and polished ; that your consciences are, if not like Mr. Figgs' pound weights three ounces short, at least distinct parts of your organisation, which you can detach from the whole, and leave at home in charge of the mistress when you go forth in the morning."

"You must not be quite so hard on us, Jardine. Besides, I scarcely think you can be in earnest. Take Pilgrim. It is because he has a conscience that we hope to win him over—though, as yet, I see little hope of accomplishing it."

"Have you tried him much?" asked Exmoor.

"As far as one can venture, without being rude. He seems resolved, if Maitland and Rowe will leave Church and State alone, to give them a fair trial."

"They will leave Church and State alone next session," observed Avondale. "Not much fear of that. They may go meddling about it a little and offend a good many without conciliating any, but they will not make such an onslaught on the sacred union as to alarm good Sir Edward. I have much greater faith in Maitland making

some rash appointment to a bishopric, and in that way getting rid of his Attorney-General."

"I have not thought of that," said FitzHenry. "I know Pilgrim was much annoyed when Tracy's name was mentioned last summer for Doncaster. Maitland would not unlikely wish to put him in at the next vacancy."

"Most likely," said Avondale. "Then Dr. Nocrede is another intimate friend of Maitland's. If, by any set of circumstances, these two were raised to the episcopal bench, Sir Edward and the Premier would part company. Even as it is I doubt if there is such a firm union between them as you imagine. The slight hints which Abel furnished Mr. Jardine with some time since, show that however level the surface may be, the waters are in commotion beneath. Maitland has no religion, if politics stand in the way; Rowe has none at all, under any circumstances; Sloe's chief dogma is hatred of the National Church—is it possible that these views can long avoid clashing with those of Sir Edward, who puts his church before his worldly prospects or his country's welfare, who would, unhesitatingly, in

defence of that Church and her privileges and formulas, head another band around whom should be again lighted the fires of Smithfield?"

"Really looking at the matter in all its bearings," said Jardine, "I do not think Pilgrim can work long with the present Government—but how to detach him early in January?"

"The bishop of Ilminster is in failing health," replied Avondale. "His life and the year may easily come to an end together. Could no means be devised for tempting Maitland to send Tracy or Nocrede to Ilminster in his place? This done, could not the modern Chrysostom, whose golden tones cause even the Chief Justice to smooth his rugged brow—could not he, backed up by the eloquence of three ex-Ministers and of two in prospective, find words to persuade Sir Edward to cut loose from the unkempt crew with whom he is now associated?"

"But, Avondale," expostulated Exmoor, "have some pity on our inferior intellects; don't sneer quite so pointedly. You treat us as Rowe does a deputation of poor law guardians or shop-keeping vestrymen. How are you going to give

the first blow to your chain of balls, so that the shock may in good time reach the last, and send it flying off from its neighbours?"

"You will do that. Frescheville has not received his promotion yet."

"True enough, and he is rather savage about it."

"His house is not far north of Avonmouth, and not so very many miles from Sir Charles Popworth's, where you said a day or two ago you will be spending the New Year's week. If a vacancy happens between now and then, I imagine that you might do something with Frescheville. You will, of course, while in Lyddonshire see him once or twice; he is, my sister tells me, to be at Lady Popworth's ball. If you have any objection to humbugging him I have none. I will, if you will stand by and nod occasionally, persuade him first that Maitland has treated him very badly, secondly, as a slight apology, and as a mark of deference to his superior abilities, that he ought to have the nomination to the vacancy, and thirdly, that Dr. Nocrede—Pilgrim detests him—ought to be appointed."

“Capital, capital,” said FitzHenry. “Frescheville will take the bait ; so will Maitland, too, if, Avondale, you let him understand that Jardine is favourably disposed to Nocrede.”

“I bar that,” objected the Scotchman. “Our consultations generally would, if carried on for any other purpose, make us liable for an indictment for conspiracy, and I must really refuse to allow any one to be under the impression that I should be delighted to see Nocrede—or even Satan himself—attired in the lawn of a bishop.”

A laugh drowned Jardine’s expostulations. “We won’t compromise you, my dear sir,” replied Exmoor. “But, Avondale, how will you secure a hearing with Frescheville? You are on such bad terms with Jessie, and she is the real head.”

“My dear Exmoor, what genuine simplicity! Kiss and make friends, to be sure. After a tiff and a reconciliation, lovers are closely in love. We should be as intimate as could be for, perhaps, a whole week.”

“That nasty grating tone, Walter,” said Mr. Jardine.

“I am very sorry, sir.” To Exmoor, “How is Digby now?”

“Nearly well again. I had a note yesterday from the Marchioness. She said he was to leave the Towers to-day or to-morrow. What is your opinion of him as a politician, FitzHenry?”

“Will never be anything—too changeable. He was an obstinate Tory when he took his degree, he is a rampant Rad now. His brother is just the same—he would be a Tory if it weren’t for Englander, he would be a Liberal if it weren’t for Maitland.”

“Too proud to follow, yet without the brains sufficient for a leader,” observed Avondale.

“Maitland would be a splendid follower,” said FitzHenry, “if he could curb his ambition. He has, no one can deny it, vast genius, capacity, and energy, but he is impulsive, wayward, obstinate, as a child—more’s the pity. In another respect, too, he is not fitted for a leader—he cannot take in at one glance the full details of a great measure, he must see it piece-meal, his mind is not comprehensive, and so he often becomes a mere advocate.”

“Very true,” assented Exmoor. “He is a man that rises above his fellows, but his defects are such as to prevent him governing those over whom he towers. By the by, I suppose Claybourne would take Sir Edward’s place—who would be solicitor?”

“Greenham Softhead,” said FitzHenry.

“Nonsense.”

“He would, I assure you.”

“But he is too young,” objected Avondale.

“No younger than myself. He is a connecting link between Sloe and Rowe, a representation, though faint, of both. He has their bad qualities in double intensity, and unredeemed by their good points. He has the demagogue’s hatred for titles, but it is not an honest hatred like his; he has the philosopher’s contempt for imbecility, but it is the contempt which one fool ever has for another.”

“Very pretty,” said Exmoor, laughing. “If Jardine and I associate much more with such close observers as you and Avondale, we may be inoculated with some of your causticity and sarcasm. I presume we have our arrangements

settled for the next fortnight or so. When does Kerr come up?"

"By the middle of January," replied Jardine.

"So does Herbert Williams, for whom Bransdon and myself will answer. There will be a new Minister of Education before Parliament re-opens."

CHAPTER V.

NOEL, Noel, Noel! Christmas, king of good fellows, who comest with cheerful countenance, and laughing loud, and who bringest mirth, and joy, and gladness to the rich, the wealthy, the fortunate—who comest with gloomy visage, and frowning dread, and who bringest pain and cold, and death to the poor, the hungry, the outcast. No need for me to sing again for the myriadth time thy song of jollity, and welcome; and I cannot rouse the dirge of despair, and the funeral chaunt, with which multitudes greet thy advent.

Stuart Jardine accompanied Avondale to Avondale. He had been looking forward eagerly for the moment when he should, as his mother put it, revisit Lyddonshire.

“Not going to spend Christmas day with us, Stuart,” she said. “You wish, I suppose, to revisit Lyddonshire?”

“Yes, mater,” he replied, looking rather foolish, while Mary laughed somewhat unnecessarily, and his father added—

“Stuart is suddenly grown very fond of the country. A month ago he was desperately anxious to come up to town. Now, he is just as anxious to get away. Perhaps, the last few days’ rain has improved the appearance of the country generally ; still, I myself must confess, I prefer London just now—though there is no accounting for tastes.”

So Stuart went, and Edith received him with a pleasant smile, and with a touch of the hand that sent a tremor through his body, and made him blush and stammer like a boy. He, however, soon recovered his speech, and had as much to tell her as if he had been on a tour to the mountains of the moon, or engaged in a conspiracy to dethrone Burra-Booda-Bumptious, tyrant of the Gaboon, and had narrowly escaped being served up for dessert at that potentate’s table. And, certainly, his adventures, though not so startling, appeared to afford the utmost interest to both parties.

"But, if I could not hear from you, Edith—may I call you Edith, please?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"If you please—and that fellow, Vrynne, always calls you Edith; I know I shall punch his head some day. Besides, you may, in revenge, call me Stuart."

"Go on, sir, with what you were saying."

"I did so long to hear from you, but I had to content myself with such scraps as Polly would read out to me from her letters. However, I bagged all the others that I could lay hands upon—a whole half-dozen."

"It was very wrong of Polly to let you have the opportunity of seeing any of my notes, very wrong. I am quite angry with her."

"Of course you are—and with Walter too, for I got one from him—don't look so cross, please—the last one. He handed it to me to read what you said about the people who will be at Lady Popworth's ball; and I folded up the blank half of a note of my own, and put in the envelope, and handed it back to him. He could not find it afterwards, though he searched everywhere."

“It was a very ungentlemanly action, Mr. Jardine. I am surprised at your doing it.”

“But I got the letter, though.”

“Which you will please return to me.”

“Oh, Edith—Miss Edith, I mean—that would be unnecessary cruelty.”

Miss Avondale tried to look cross, but she could not.

Stuart Jardine was very attentive to her during the whole of the visit—too attentive, the house-keeper thought, when the frost had set in, and there was no excuse for him for staying at home. So she stated rather pointedly to him that,—

“Young men ought not to stay indoors in the country. It is dry overhead, and underfoot, Mr. Jardine, and you can go for a walk, or a ride, whichever suits you.”

Christmas eve they spent at Mr. Vryne's. It was the first time Avondale had, for a whole year, seen Miss Vryne. Edith had been nervously anticipating the meeting. The marriage of her brother with Florence was a hope whose realisation she had long desired. She had noticed an indefinable change in him. He was

not exactly the same as in the summer, there was a something in his manner which she felt rather than actually observed. He did not care for Miss Dawson, of that she was convinced; did he for any one else? Stuart Jardine thought not. But her suspicions were more than confirmed when he met Miss Vrynne. The father greeted him warmly, so did the daughter, who was now, as Edith had once said, "so beautiful." She had been on the Continent for many months, and the tour and the absence had added the finishing touches to her loveliness. Her hair was thick, wavy, glossy, like Edith's, and her eyes were blue, though of a deeper tint; but her face was of a different style of beauty, more classic, and the features finely chiselled.

Poor Avondale! No wonder he got confused when Mr. Vrynne wished him "a merry Christmas," no wonder he hesitated when Florence held out her hand, no wonder he was unable to return a fitting reply when both congratulated him on the reputation he was acquiring. Poor fellow! He was, in matters of love, at least, but an ordinary mortal, erring, weak, short sighted.

He did not know his heart; that is his only excuse.

He thought he was in love with Frances Dawson, but it was only romance and vanity—a fit of that distemper which attacks the soul of all of us in our boyhood's days, like measles and mumps infect the body. He was, for the time being, in love with Clare Champion, but it was a blind passion, working upon a spirit mortified by disdain and yearning for consolation, and fed by a chivalrous sympathy for a kindred mind.

He now saw Florence Vrynne, the companion from infancy upwards of himself and his sister; he saw her after an unfortunate absence, at a most critical period, clad with roses, radiant as Rhodus when first Helios beheld her rising from the sea, with the light upon her golden hair, and the bloom upon her cheek; he saw her matured in intellect as Clare Champion, matured in grace as Clare Champion was twelve weary years before; he saw her—I cannot say he loved, but he could not converse with her as easily as he did in earlier life.

But, be that as it may, in a few days he did

love her. Both were, on New Year's Eve, at Lady Popworth's ball; half the county had assembled at their member's summons. Florence Vrynne was, by universal acclaim, the queen. She laughed and talked, and won the homage of all, but there was a piteousness in her pleasure which Edith Avondale, the twin star of the evening, could not fail to detect. Walter was most attentive to her, but his attentions either were not those of a devout lover, or they were purposely relieved of warmth and glow.

It was a joyous evening—country people do, I fancy, always enjoy themselves at their reunions more than inhabitants of the towns. They may be somewhat distant at first, but, when the frigidity is rubbed off, they go in for unrestrained amusement. They are without the alarm that haunts all large assemblies in towns—the alarm of making disagreeable acquaintances. No need to fear that at a county ball one will meet the tailor who brought you some half a dozen hours since the vest that sets off your figure so well, and for which you were eternally obliged to him; no need to keep a sharp look out lest you run

against the skilful artist to whose defty hand the auburn locks that cluster round your intellectual brow owe so much of their magnificence.

Such *rencontres* may be very proper, and we may all at social science tea-fights uphold the necessity of such intercourse between class and class, and it may sound wretchedly caddish to confess that we dislike them; but they do, nevertheless, create a certain amount of embarrassment—to one side at least. At a county ball every one knows that, though his neighbour be personally a stranger to him, yet he comes of good family and belongs to a rank equal to his own.

It is a hard fight for an outsider to get admittance. Sir Jacob Screwdriver, the manufacturer of half the tools used on the face of the globe, may heap up a pot of money, may contrive to stick “Sir” before and “Bart.” after his patronymic; may purchase the mansion which the extravagance of His Grace of Glenlivat or the Most Honourable of Brayclift has compelled him to sell; may crowd together there tons of ancient statues—recently made—and yards of paintings by old masters—of which neither paint nor can-

was was in existence ten years before ; may get rid of pastor, and deacon, and elder, and diligently put in an appearance every Sunday at the Parish Church, which his early Radicalism incited him to revile—he may do all this, but the pettiest of petty squires, the man whose barony is now a farm round which a half-hour's walk will easily take him, coldly refuses the overflowing hospitality of the new baronet and deems him a far inferior animal.

“His overflowing hospitality?” That is, perhaps, not quite the fact. It is the mean greatness and the shopkeeping hauteur of the *parvenu* which estrange good families from him. Let him be possessed of a generous disposition, a kind heart, a frank demeanour, and, whatever his origin, whatever his line of life, whatever his little defects in manners or breeding, he will meet with few so churlish as to shut their doors against him.

To Stuart Jardine the ball seemed all that was delightful. He had hitherto cared little for dancing, and less for parties where the female element was in preponderance, but in this respect

his feelings had undergone a radical change. He could also bathe his eyes and see that Vrynné, though very intimate with Edith, was in love, if with any one, with Alice, the second daughter of the host. Still with the inconsistency and jealousy of an ardent admirer, he could never observe him speak to Miss Avondale, never hear him address her as "Edith," without being terribly annoyed and terribly angry.

And I fear that both Miss Avondale and Miss Popworth took many an opportunity of playing upon his feelings. They praised Vrynné to him as being a genius, as being most amiable and considerate, as being most chivalrous and polite, and never in a bad humour or sulky temper, while they lectured him upon his discourtesy when he was perspiring with his exertions to obtain their good opinion, and upon his taciturnity, though he had been chattering like a Frenchman; and then Edith would say, "Charlie, do this or that," and all three would laugh till Jardine would be near bursting with spite and vexation. But a smile or a look, or, "hold my fan, if you please, Mr. Jardine," or, the chance dropping of a flower

or, "Yes, I am not engaged, and you may put down your name on my tablet, so that I may not forget," and Stuart was again happy as a king.

But not so, Avondale, who was agitated with a singular variety of feelings. He could not blot from his memory the confession twice made to Clare Campion, he could not for many minutes together keep his eyes off Florence Vrynne. The strife and contending rush well-nigh sickened him; yet he compelled himself to don a beaming countenance, and to banter, and chaff, and joke, for he was the cavalier of Jessie Frescheville. She, the Earl, and Countess were the guests of Lord Whatcombe, and had received, through him, invitations. Whatcombe had spoken to them very highly of the Avondale family, and of Walter in particular, and was greatly interested to learn that they were already acquainted with him. Exmoor was also one of the company, and the Bishop of Ilminster having expired a few days previously, he was, with Avondale, busily engaged in carrying out their pre-arranged plan.

Politics and the ball room, a county ball room! —the incongruity struck Avondale most forcibly.

He looked around the glittering crowd, and bitter was the reflection that his heart, which ought to have been the lightest, was probably the saddest there.

One of the guests was Sir Arthur Fernie, the owner of large property in South Lyddonshire, a man some three or four years older than himself. He was intimate with Mr. Vrynné, and a something more than admirer of Miss Vrynné. Avondale had once or twice during his present visit heard Sir Arthur's name coupled with Miss Vrynné's—he was now a witness to his attentions, and he could not interfere.

Jealousy, thy pangs are next to the tortures which a woman's malice will inflict, the most unendurable of sufferings that can befall poor humanity.

Avondale absolutely sickened as he saw Fernie filling the place he had hitherto filled by Miss Vrynné's side, and filling it, too, apparently, in the good opinion of her father. He grew faint. Exmoor was near. "The room is insufferably hot, Exmoor; give me your arm; I want a glass of brandy or a mouthful of fresh air." The

Marquis walked with him into the breakfast parlour.

“You look white, Avondale. But can you drink off brandy like that? What’s the matter?”

“Nothing; most of us get a twinge and a qualm now and then—but it does good; purifies the blood, I suppose.”

CHAPTER VI.

EARL FRESCHVILLE had not yet received his Marquisate, and he was much enraged thereat. This Avondale easily learnt from the Lady Jessie, who had again grown wonderfully kind and condescending—perhaps because she observed how intimate Whatcombe and Exmoor were with him, perhaps because she could read aright the schemes that kept flitting through his brain, perhaps because—but it is no use speculating on the origin of many a fair lady's whim. “The wind bloweth where it listeth, but no man knoweth whence it cometh or whither it goeth.” Be this as it may, she danced with him so often as to draw down on her a reproof from her mother, and to inflict on Florence and Edith a pang which Stuart Jardine did his best to remove.

“He does not care a pin for Lady Jessie Frescheville, indeed he does not, Miss Edith ; I

am sure of it. He is only paying her compliments and pouring flattery into her ear in order to get at her father."

"But he has no business to flatter her. It is altogether ungentlemanly—you are all ungentlemanly—I should not have supposed Walter could do so."

"But, it is surely not unpolite of him to flatter her or any other lady. She likes it, and it won't do any harm—she, of course, estimates it at just what it is worth."

"It will do harm, it will. Poor Florence! why does he not flatter her?"

Then Stuart knew distinctly, what he before could only darkly guess at. He had heard at his former visit, and since from his sister, quite sufficient to give him a hint of the relations between the two families, but not till now did he understand the full import of the hint—not till next evening, when Edith told him how earnestly her father and herself wished for the marriage, how Mr. Vrynne had, whatever his present wishes were, also desired it, and how poor Florence!—but her feelings she would not betray.

“Walter does not care for any one, I am sure he does not,” was all that Stuart could repeat. “I should know it if he did. While he has been in town I have not during the last two years missed many days without seeing him, and I know all his affairs. He was much vexed last summer about Miss Dawson. He cannot have fallen in love since. He would be just as likely to be in love with Polly as with Lady Jessie Frescheville. He must like Miss Vrynne, he certainly must—she is so beautiful, almost as beautiful as yourself.”

“Don’t talk nonsense, please; and take care of your queen. See you have got into a nice fix. You must lose queen or castle by my knight, and I shall check you also next move, and then take the bishop afterwards.”

They were playing chess after dinner in the library, an antique apartment on the ground floor, with dark oak wainscotting, and having many portraits hung round. The game had lasted a very long time, for it was often interrupted by conversation. They were by themselves by the fire at one end of the room—“not to be disturbed

in the game"—with Edith's Italian greyhound on the hearthrug; while at the other were the housekeeper, the widow of a late incumbent of Avondale church, Mr. Avondale, and a guest from town who had run down that morning. One at least of the two players found the game interesting as chess never had been before.

Avondale was the same evening at Whatcombe dining with the Lord-Lieutenant, Frescheville, and Exmoor. Lord Whatcombe, receiving a hint from Exmoor, had at the ball pressed on him the invitation which he was nothing loath to accept. Whatcombe was a Whig rather than a Liberal. He believed in Liberalism when it meant the ascendancy of a few great houses, not the admission of all classes to a share in the Government. He was, therefore, by no means an adherent of the present Ministry, and, Exmoor having made him acquainted with some slight portion of the schemes of the Opposition, he had no objection to assist in fanning the flame of discontent that was rankling in Frescheville's heart. The Earl willingly swallowed the bait. Persuaded in his own mind that he possessed wonderful faculties and

resistless influence, the persuasion became a certainty when Exmoor and his host skilfully flattered his self-conceit. Persuaded that the Premier had, out of pure jealousy and personal ill-will, overlooked his claims for promotion, he, without much hesitation, assented to the advice that he should both demand a Marquisate and recommend Dr. Nocrede for the see of Ilminster.

"The Premier must be a most two-faced man," he lamented.

"A modern edition of Janus," suggested Avondale.

"Yes; he sees half a dozen ways at once, and puts on a different mask for each person with whom he has anything to do."

"Most improper—decidedly dishonourable."

"Of course it is, Mr. Avondale—conduct utterly unbecoming a gentleman. I am sure that in order to gain a point with any one, you would never be guilty of such contemptible proceedings as to pretend great concern and respect for him and to make innumerable promises, and then as soon as you have obtained your end, forget pretences and promises, and consign your darling friend to oblivion."

Here Exmoor gave Avondale such a quizzing glance, that the latter, to avoid a burst of laughter, was compelled to take refuge behind his pocket handkerchief. Recovering himself after some minutes' very needless application of that article of dress to his olfactory organ, and having swallowed a glass of port consequent upon Lord Whatcombe's observation, "a bit of a cold, Mr. Avondale—try some wine"—he said,

"No, no, my lord, I trust I should never attempt to mislead any one whose good opinion I wished to retain," which assertion was the exact truth.

"But Mr. Maitland has evidently treated you very shabbily."

"Very shabbily," exclaimed the Earl, warming with the sympathy exhibited. "Why I actually invited him and Sloe—yes, positively Sloe, who has so often reviled me—" ("Most Christian condescension!")—"him and Sloe to my house to meet Bayswater and Tintern, when Tintern was going to resign because of the muddle Blocke Head had got the Home Office into about that extradition case."

“ Ah, I understood it was owing to you that the matter was smoothed over,” said Exmoor, who, by the by, had not, till the present moment, heard anything about the actual quarrel between Blocke Head and the sub., though, of course, he was perfectly acquainted with all the other facts.

“ Yes, Exmoor, entirely owing to me. Bayswater came to me a week or so after I left Egremont, because he knew how angry Tintern was, who had joined us a day or two previously. Tintern had, in fact, sent in his resignation.

ayswater begged him to withdraw it, and as he would not, we telegraphed for Maitland. The Premier came at once, bringing Sloe, who happened to be staying with them. Both were greatly grieved at Tintern’s determination ; they estimated his abilities very highly. Sloe apologised for any words or speeches of his which might have annoyed Tintern. That is one good point—the only good point—about that demagogue. If he is abusive he will generally, when his conduct is shown to be offensive, confess the error of his ways, and make the *amende honorable*.

He spoke to me in a way I could not have given him credit for ; said that though he experienced an instinctive hatred to titles generally, yet it was to the title, to the hereditariness, not to the person bearing it, and that for me he had the utmost regard."

"Mr. Sloe is doubtless a most excellent man at heart," observed Avondale, though doubting whether there were any dolt or knave in the British Isles who could not humbug Frescheville.

"Most excellent, and he completely won over the Countess. Well, Tintern assured Mr. Sloe that he was on the best terms with him, though he considered it would be better if he (Sloe) would now and then, at public meetings, say nothing at all if he could not avoid trenching on dangerous ground. They debated and bothered for a long time, till at last Tintern flatly declared he would no longer remain in the Cabinet in any inferior post. After a pause Sloe said, 'Could we not do without Mr. Herbert Williams? His views are scarcely advanced enough.' Bayswater looked at Maitland, and then answered slowly,

‘I imagine so. We cannot afford to lose you, Tintern; what say you to that department?’ Tintern protested that he should be most unwilling to be in any way the cause of Mr. Williams’ withdrawal; but, of course, the whole of the Ministry would make similar protests under the like circumstances; and they wound up the conclave by agreeing to get rid of Williams, by fair means or foul, as the necessity might be.”

“A band of conspirators!” exclaimed Avondale.

“So you will say when you hear how they behaved to me. Maitland and Bayswater were immensely obliged; they could not sufficiently express their thanks for the great services I had rendered them. I had, of course, been unceasing in my endeavours with Tintern, and had added my argument to theirs to prevent him deserting them. I wished no thanks, I had simply acted as my conscience prompted me, and so I told them, but I did remind Bayswater of the offer made voluntarily by him, and without solicitation from me, that I should be raised a step in the peerage. Maitland would do any-

thing, and Sloe was especially profuse—a Dukedom, the Garter, and I know not what—I could not have imagined that he, such an advanced Radical, would have been so ready to honour one of his fellows ; but he is a most discriminating individual, and, I fear, has been judged too harshly. (The solution of the cause of Sloe’s gushing liberality was probably that arrived at afterwards by Avondale and Exmoor, viz., that the honourable gentleman had such an utter contempt for coronets and crosses as to deem them only fit for baubles with which to amuse dolts and simpletons, and that, consequently, considering Frescheville the aptest representative of these sections of humanity, he had been ready to heap upon him any number of the glittering toys.) Now, will you believe that I have not since heard one single word from either of them upon this subject ?”

“ Disgraceful !” ejaculated Exmoor.

“ Double dealing,” exclaimed Whatcombe.

“ But I fear it is only what one may expect when one joins in a conspiracy,” said Avondale.

“ I have no doubt your lordship’s conscience has

often smitten you for the part you had in bringing about the dismissal, for it is no less, and under circumstances of the grossest indignity, of Mr. Williams."

"Yes, Mr. Avondale, I have since bitterly regretted the part I took. To think that I should have thus assisted men so utterly unworthy of assistance. Ingratitude is the most heinous of crimes. Of course, as I have said, I desired no recompense for my exertions, but the idea that I should have been employed by them as a tool, and should be now thrown aside without receiving the acknowledgment promised, is intensely annoying."

Frescheville spoke with the most delightful simplicity. Whatcombe looked at Exmoor, and then suddenly wheeled round and made a violent attack upon the fire; Exmoor dropped his handkerchief and had great difficulty in untwisting it from the leg of his chair. Avondale sipped his wine; then, in gravest tone—

"Abominable duplicity on their part; one would scarcely have expected such conduct from the Duke of Bayswater, but you don't know

whom to trust. I presume Mr. Digby took upon himself at Egremont to make proposals of some kind or other to your lordship?"

"Yes, he did," replied the Earl, viciously, "but dissimulation is always punished in the long run. You see he broke his leg directly afterwards."

"He richly deserved it. Your lordship has been far too open-hearted, far too apt to put other men on a par with yourself."

"I fear I have been; I will not make the same mistake again."

"Digby, no doubt, pretended to be entrusted with full power to enter into negotiation with you; pretended to have vast interest, direct and indirect, with the Ministry."

"He did; he said, perhaps not in as many words, that he was familiar with Bayswater's wishes and intentions, and that he was directed to act as plenipotentiary; then hinted at a dukedom."

"And yet he was only scheming for his own ends all the while."

"How so, Mr. Avondale? How so? He may

have been boastful and not quite straightforward, but it could hardly have all been lies what he told me."

"It is again your lordship's deep sense of honour which has prevented you seeing Digby in his real colours. He was a Tory a year or two since; he is a Radical now."

"Ah, I forgot; that is bad."

"It should have made you suspicious of him; but what surely must clear up any doubt you still have as to his motives, is the fact that the late creation of peers included his cousin, Lord Engaine, and his intended father-in-law, Mr. Strickland. Digby has played his cards well."

"He has, Mr. Avondale," exclaimed Frescheville, jumping up in a towering rage. "He is a thorough swindler, no better than those fellows at Waterbridge. I saw the names, but the import of the connection did not strike me. He is no gentleman, Mr. Avondale, no gentleman. Do you think, Whatcombe, that any gentleman could descend to such behaviour?"

"Utterly unprincipled," assented Whatcombe.

"Mean, base, treacherous. His principles are

those of the rogue who drugs or hoodwinks you first and then picks your pocket at leisure. Why he actually assured me—on my honour he did—that our young friend was the plotter he himself turns out to be, and, having thus produced a bad impression in my mind, he persuaded me to leave Egremont lest my confiding disposition should expose me to the risk of being involved in his political manœuvres. I am very sorry, Mr. Avondale, and I apologise for the opinion I was thus induced to form of you.”

“Don’t mention it, my lord—let it pass away,” replied Avondale, with the most Christian forgiveness.

The Earl being thus in a proper state of feeling, yielded implicitly to the recommendations of Exmoor, and agreed to return to town with that nobleman two days later, and to present his demands, like a brace of pistols, at the Premier’s head.

“Well, Avondale,” said Exmoor, an hour or two later, in his dressing room, “Whatcombe and myself are both extremely obliged to you for the insight into human nature with which

your skill favoured us this evening. By Jove, I have for well nigh twenty years mingled with all sorts of men; but I have never dreamed that there could be in creation such a consummate ass, such an unmitigated fool, such an unleavened lump of conceit, as Frescheville."

"Yet, it is such as he who compose the majority of the race."

" ' Mere puppets, they who come and go,' obedient to the bidding of such as I, acting under the bidding of such as you."

"No, no, Exmoor. It is you who should pull the strings; it is I who run about to see the machine is working well."

CHAPTER VII.

RIDING home next morning, Avondale passed Miss Vrynné, attended by Sir Arthur Fernie, and followed by a groom. She bowed, coloured deeply, and he flushed too—the flush of pain. Her image had not been absent from him many minutes together during the last twenty-four hours. While he was occupied, while he was plotting, scheming, planning, he felt easy, but directly politics were banished from his mind, love would take its place. He was only too glad of an excuse for going back to London with Exmoor. There he should be absent from Miss Vrynné—perhaps he might forget her.

His sister met him as he entered the Hall. “I hope, Walter, you have settled your political affairs, and can give us a little more of your company.”

"I fear not, dear Edith. I have to accompany Exmoor to London to-morrow."

"But, Walter! Is it necessary? Jessie Langham and her brother were over here yesterday, and are getting up an impromptu party solely for you and Mr. Jardine next Monday. Please don't run away. Florence will be there."

"And Fernie, too, I suppose?"

"What if he is. You know, or ought to know, whether she cares about him. Oh, Walter, how stupidly you behaved at the ball. I was so sorry; and I am quite sure Florence felt your unkindness."

"No doubt. I don't exactly see in what my unkindness lay. And, anyhow, Miss Vrynne consoled herself very fairly with the baronet's assistance."

It may be taken as an induction obtained from countless instances, that the more unmistakably a man is in the wrong, the more stubbornly he refuses to acknowledge his error, and the more harshly he blames the person to whom he ought to apologise.

"Miss Vrynne," exclaimed Edith, "have you

forgotten her name is Florence, or is your memory gone with your politeness? I almost think ambition has crazed you. What right had you to be so attentive to Lady Jessie Frescheville?"

"I was no more than ordinarily polite to her, or at least did not intend to be so. But, dear Edith, don't speak quite so unkindly to me. I have had a great deal of bother of one sort and the other." His tone was very weary, and his sister threw her arms round his neck, and kissed him again and again, but she could not prevail on him to change his determination.

"Stuart," he said at lunch, "I am sorry that you and I must be off again to-morrow."

"I hope not," said Mr. Avondale. "Why?"

"Some important transactions will be carried out this week, and Exmoor is anxious I should be present. The resignation of Sir Edward Pilgrim, and Mr. Herbert Williams is daily expected."

"I am sorry, Walter," said his father, "but there will be no need for your guest, Mr. Bayfield, to go too. He and I are great friends, and I intend to show him about the neighbourhood, and

to knock over a few snipe before I let him go."

"Confound you and your politics, Walter," lamented Jardine that evening. "Here I was hoping we had settled down for a week or two."

"But you will have been here nearly a fortnight; and, besides, we shall be down again to attend the grand concert at Newbury, on the 1st of February."

"So we shall, that is some slight consolation, but it is nearly a month yet to it. Oh, dear. I wish I could be transformed into Bayfield for the next few days."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE papers of the Monday morning announced the appointment of Dr. Nocrede to the See of Ilminster; the evening editions of the same announced the resignation of Sir Edward Pilgrim. Frescheville had taken the earliest opportunity of calling on the Premier, who had also returned from the Christmas vacation, as indeed had many others of the Ministry, recalled earlier than usual by the severe illness of one bishop, and the death of another, and by the vague reports that were flying about. Maitland charmed Frescheville by readily acquiescing in his recommendation, at the same time persuading the Earl that he did so entirely to oblige him—though in truth, Nocrede had three days before been notified of the elevation. Maitland also assured the Earl that his services had not been forgotten, that his name had been constantly in the mouths

of his colleagues, that the delay had arisen solely from a consideration of the claims of other parties, that they had hesitated which to offer him—an Irish Dukedom, an English Marquisate, or the vacant Garter. Perhaps his lordship would, now that they had an opportunity which might not occur again of confidential explanations, give him—solely, of course, as a private individual—a hint which of these three would be most acceptable.

The Earl needed no time to consider,—“The strawberry leaves,”—and then, overpowered by the Premier’s condescension, made him acquainted, as far as he could, with the designs of the rival party. But of these his knowledge did not extend far. Exmoor and Avondale had had too low an opinion of his discretion and good sense to admit him into any of their secrets. They had treated him just as the Premier did now—extricated every scrap of information that his little head contained, and then dismissed him, after stuffing the void with humbug and flattery.

It was not alone the elevation of Nocrede which produced the withdrawal of Sir Edward Pilgrim.

FitzHenry had brought all his persuasion into play, and the revelations of the intentions of a certain section of the Cabinet with regard to Williams, a personal friend of Sir Edward, had rendered his efforts successful. Indeed, it is not unlikely, that had Pilgrim remained true to Maitland, Nocrede would not have been appointed. It is difficult to say which was cause and which effect. The Premier distrusted the lawyer's allegiance, the lawyer distrusted the Premier's orthodoxy; so, perhaps, the truest account of the matter is that Pilgrim resigned because Nocrede was promoted, and Nocrede was promoted because Pilgrim resigned. The two events were simultaneous, though, in appearance, one was a few hours the later.

Kerr and Williams returned the next day, the one from Balloch, the other from Llanrhydwr-machyn-glynwrhos-pwllurehchrwgg, a delightful little village at the foot of Gwyffllyn, and at the head of the valley of Bachbwech-ŷ-ddasfwdhull.

The Marquis followed on Wednesday. He gave a dinner on Thursday, which was attended by Exmoor, Jardine, Bransdon, Williams, Avon-

dale, Wyversley, and his nephew, the Marquis of Stonehenge. He was in grand spirits. "Who is to be your new Attorney-General, Williams?"

"Claybourne, I suppose."

"Suppose! Do they treat you as badly as that, and furnish you with such bits of news only as have already appeared in the newspapers? That is rather hard lines."

"Who has issued that order," asked Exmoor, "that all the old pens are to be saved up and be renovated?"

"He won't know," said Jardine, laughing, "but I can tell him. It was Rowe—his logical mind sees things so very clearly that he now and then looks quite over them, and does not see them at all. Whom are you going to put on as goose-quill-scraper? I imagine Blocke Head would be extremely well suited for the post."

"He would lose his way going from one office to another," objected the Marquis.

"He certainly would not be able to keep account of the number of quills he had received from each office," added Bransdon.

"And how much do you hope to save by this

neat arrangement?" enquired Wharfedale. "You must pay your new *employé* at least £2 a week—you could not get an artist fitted for your work for less—and he will, probably, mend half-a-sovereign's worth of old nibs in a month."

"But you forget," said Avondale, "that all the inkstands are to be washed out once a week, and the results sold to the manufacturers of penny ink-bottles. Is it not reported that the President of the Board of Trade intends to stick upon the facade of his department in Whitehall a big board inscribed—

"‘Licensed retailer of ink. N.B.—Any quantity of waste paper for cheesemongers and butter dealers. Also quill pens doubly renovated cheap, and trebly ditto very cheap. N.N.B.—Any articles taken in exchange, especially screws and nails to fasten down some of the loose boards, and a few squares of glass to repair the upper windows.’"

"And is not the Right Honourable John Bayndon, First Lord of the Admiralty, going to put up over his establishment—

"‘Marine stores of all sorts, from candle ends

and rusty nails to damaged cannons and useless ships, sold much below cost price. A few job lots remarkably cheap. N.B.—Clerks and messengers loaned out by the hour, or writing and engrossing done on the premises most expeditiously and at most moderate charges. Worn-out mechanics to be had for a song. N.N.B.—Business done on mutual principles—especially a purveyor of cat's meat would be liberally dealt with, the supply of that article having been cut off at head quarters.' ”

A very undignified roar of laughter broke from all as Avondale concluded. Williams was, however, a most good-tempered man, and bore the chaffing with smiling countenance.

“The whole country must feel under the greatest possible obligation to the present Government,” observed Jardine. “With the new year they have inaugurated the, the, Economium, or whatever is the term. I must appeal to you, Williams—what is the term for the period when the penny-wise-and-pound-foolish system will be in full force? ”

“But there are other occurrences for which

the country will not thank them," said the Marquis. "Look at the state Ireland is in."

"Ireland ever is in a state," objected Williams. "It has been, as long as I can remember anything about politics, the bugbear of lord-lieutenants and premiers."

"It seems to me, however," replied Wharfedale, "to be seething and boiling rather more vehemently now than for some time past. It would be easy to draw up a bill of indictment against your Irish department; and Hainesbury would be a very good man to present it. For him Percy Mulgrave is no match—indeed Mulgrave, miserable enough when advancing with friends to a charge, is simply unable to defend either himself or his colleagues from attack. The preparations bewilder, the approach of the foe terrifies, the actual assault annihilates. In the Upper House, supposing you bundle him there, he will be utterly friendless. Bayswater won't be bothered with him—it is quite enough for his Grace to have to answer for Sloe's escapades—and indeed he is much more likely to assist us in playing off tricks on the new boy; and Herne-

thorpe will be fully occupied with the army estimates. You may be sure then, Williams, we will give it to Master Mulgrave. We will serve him as urchins at school do a trembling novitiate into the realm of torture—pull his hair and pinch his nose, poke pins into him and batter his new hat, steal his cake and sweets, and take away his marbles, till he blubbers; then spank him well to get him into good humour again; and finally, if he is particularly fretful, put him head-first into a dirty coal sack and send him back whence he came.”

Another burst of laughter. “Wharfedale,” exclaimed Exmoor, “I did not imagine you were so vicious.”

“Poor Mulgrave,” soliloquised Williams, “I don’t think I shall be betraying any confidence by saying that he does not altogether appreciate the prospect before him. He dreads the House of Lords as much as Æneas did the temple of the Sibyl.”

“You are betraying no confidence,” said Bransdon. “Dr. Ormond told me yesterday that he had been treating Mulgrave since the begin-

ing of December for malignant *tremor cordis*, combined with gelidification of the marrow, and he added that the disease, though of rare occurrence, was very prevalent now amongst the members of the Government."

So the banter went on, and Williams, if not already determined to resign, had, before the evening closed, come to that resolution.

"When does Hainesbury return?" he asked.

"Next week, early," replied Exmoor. "I had a note from him to that effect this morning. He enquired very particularly after Mulgrave—will doubtless be excessively shocked to hear of the malady that has seized him—and trusted that nothing had intervened to disturb the *entente cordiale* between Sloe and Rowe."

"On the last point the 'Constitutional' the other day could have satisfied him," said Avondale. "The old lady reminded her readers that wolves devoured each other only when they had no common object to fall upon, and that while gobbling up the unfortunate animal, which they had run down, they might yelp and snarl, but they certainly would not actually get to fight."

“Delicate language truly, and neatly put,” remarked Jardine. “By the by, how is it that that journal of Sloe’s, ‘The Pioneer,’ has come to a sudden death?”

“Did you not see the last issue?” said Avondale. “I got it out of curiosity. ‘The Pioneer’ proclaimed that its duty was discharged; that it had led the nation on to the borders of the promised land; that it had accomplished all the objects for the realisation of which it had been, a dozen years ago, started; that its protecting arm, and its counselling voice, might, perhaps, now, without too great risk, be withdrawn from our support; and a whole heap of bosh, winding up with a benediction on the ‘great, the glorious, the unequalled cabinet to whom had been committed—chiefly through the ‘Pioneer’s’ influence—the direction and the development of this magnificent empire.’”

“A sublime peroration, no doubt,” observed Exmoor.

“All which explanation,” added Jardine, “meant that Sloe, having become a Right

Honourable was desirous, like many others when they rise in the world, to shake himself free from ineligible acquaintances ; and had, consequently, locked up the exchequer on which the publishers drew. But the collapse of the journal, immediately that his support was withheld, is a portent and a sign, and shows, as nothing else could show, how little Republicanism there exists amongst the working classes."

Williams remained with Exmoor and the Marquis some little time after the others had left ; he called on Bransdon next morning ; there was a Cabinet council the same afternoon ; and the following morn London knew that Lord Tintern had replaced Mr. Herbert Williams as Minister of Education.

CHAPTER IX.

JANUARY past, February come. The first of this month Avondale spent in Lyddonshire. That day there was an amateur concert at Newbury, on behalf of the hospital. The concert was under the usual "distinguished patronage" of all the neighbouring dignitaries, from Mr. Noodell de Stultus to the Most High, Potent, and Noble Prince, the Duke of Doubledolt. Its programme was really very attractive, on account of both the matter, and the performers. Among the latter appeared Lady Whatcombe, Lady Jessie Frescheville, Alice Popworth, Florence Vrynné, Edith Avondale, and a host of others not known to the reader. Exmoor was there, so was Stuart Jardine, as also his father and eldest sister, who had run down specially for the occasion.

Avondale had longed, yet dreaded, to attend; he yearned to see Miss Vrynné once more, yet the

pleasure would be bought at the cost of much subsequent pain, and of a renewal of the torture which had been somewhat numbed. He often thought of the change that had come over himself and his prospects in the last twelvemonths. A year ago he had, as now, ambitious hopes and dreams, but he had no burning pangs, and he scarcely ever knew the meaning of disappointment or grief, much less of jealousy and mental misery. And, not knowing these, he denied their very existence, or, at least, affirmed that every man might keep himself free from them. He had laughed at love and passion, and had worshipped fame and intellect; he had almost ridiculed the heart and its softer promptings, and had erected into a divinity the brain and its powers. He had, it is true, a something which he styled love, which I have called vanity, for Miss Dawson; but the very weakness of this feeling blinded him to the reality of the master-emotion.

How cruelly had he been undeceived! No maddening passion could, or should, assail his soul, or influence his prospects, or career; yet,

passion for Clare Campion, had well nigh incited him to fling to the winds his prospects, and his career. No maudlin sentimentality, so he deemed the sacred flame, no unmanly spell could ever affect him—and the sentimentality and the spell were on him, and he writhed and groaned as he strove to free himself from them. He would march straight on to where, far ahead on the summit of a precipitous hill, the effulgent gates of fame's magnificent temple lay open wide, his course lighted by the pure lamp of reason; and he would not turn to right or left, either to pursue the dazzling gleams that are extinguished at the touch, or to cull the gaudy flowers whose bright hues fade even as the hands grasp them—this had been his resolve; how had he adhered to it?

Miss Vrynné did not fail to fulfil her engagement. She met Walter and his party before the concert began, and by Edith's skill, she and Walter were thrown together a few minutes.

“You are so much occupied now, Mr. Avondale, that I had hardly hoped you would be present.”

“I am afraid I have been too much occupied, Florence ; for I have not found time even to congratulate you on your return from the Continent, and to ask you how you enjoyed yourself.”

“Very much, Walter ; but towards the end I grew tired, and am very glad to find myself once more in dear old Lyddonshire.”

Poor Avondale ! The speaker’s tone thrilled through him, and he trembled violently ; he had well nigh there and then asked for forgiveness for his coldness ; he, the man with emotionless nerves. She went on—

“You are not looking well ; you are attempting too much—Edith tells me all your schemes.”

Poor Avondale ; not surprising if his face was slightly pale, and if the words that he heard intensified its pallor. He stammered out a reply, and then Mr. Vrynnne joined them.

The concert resulted in success—no hitch occurred, no performer but received an encore, but of all, Miss Vrynnne obtained the most unstinted applause. She had ever been an excellent player and singer ; her talents were perfected by

her late sojourn in Italy, and to-night she threw her whole soul and life into her endeavours. Sir Arthur Fernie was her attendant, for he had accompanied her and her father from Brentwood, but it was to Avondale that she oftenest glanced, and it was his praise that gratified her the most. The Lady Jessie had coolly appropriated Avondale, though to her father much of his old pomposity had returned. From her he learnt that the Earl's patent as Duke of Belfast would be issued in a day or two.

"I must congratulate him," said Avondale—"Maitland evidently estimates him highly—and at the same time apologise for presuming so far on your goodness as to renew, under such a change of circumstances, a prior acquaintance; but I really did not anticipate the elevation to a dukedom."

"No matter if you had," replied his companion, with a winning smile. "In the present day intellect may rank itself far above titles, and claim, instead of offering, homage."

Avondale could not but acknowledge the compliment, though the conversation was tending in

a direction where he was unwilling to follow. Lady Jessie rallied him on his absentness.

“Wrapped up in politics now? Ah! you can applaud that young lady—she has a splendid voice. Who is she?”

“Miss Vrynné—there’s her father next Lord Whatcombe. She is his only child.”

“How beautiful she is! and an heiress too! Do you know her?”

“Yes, for many years. She and my sister were playmates, and they keep up their intimacy now. Her father and mine are life-long friends.”

“Indeed; who is that with Miss Vrynné—an admirer?”

“I believe so; Sir Arthur Fernie. There’s a report that they are to be married.”

Avondale’s tone caused Lady Jessie Frescheville to look at him inquiringly. Then for the rest of the evening she remained very silent, pondering apparently some knotty problem. Avondale was silent, too, for he could not laugh and chatter while Fernie was occupying the place by Miss Vrynné’s side, which he ought to have occupied, and was rendering the services

which he ought to have rendered. He was very glad when the concert was over, and he could get away out into the dark night, and rush away home and hide himself for a few hours, at least, in his bedroom from the sight of his fellows. His sister followed him to his room.

“Walter, dear Walter, why is it you treat Florence so cruelly? Tell me please.”

But he would not, and indeed could not, tell her anything. He could only attempt to defend himself by reminding her that Sir Arthur Fernie was a constant and apparently favoured visitor at Brentwood; but she saw clearly that this was no explanation.

CHAPTER X.

NEXT morning the Lyddonshire foxhounds met at Duncombe Malreward. The weather was fine but cold, the sky clear, and a South-East wind blowing, and the ground consequently a trifle hard.

Stuart Jardine, Avondale and his sister, and many of those who had been at the concert the preceding evening.—Lady Jessie Frescheville, Lord Whatcombe, Exmoor—were at the meet. Miss Vrynné's groom approached Walter and Edith.

“Mr. Walter, if you please, sir, Miss Florence is riding that bay mare, Lily. You know, sir, she is very vicious, not half broken, and she ran away with me last May. The squire is afraid of her, and made me bring another horse, but Miss Florence will ride her. Could you, sir, or Miss Edith, say a word to my young lady?”

They sought her. "Florence, you don't mean to ride Lily—she is quite unsafe."

"Why not, Edith? She is a nice looking mare, trots well and so on, and you don't think I have suddenly forgotten, whatever else I may have forgotten, how to keep my seat, do you?"

"But it is not how to keep your seat, Miss Vrynne," said Walter. "The mare is quite vicious, she might easily take it in her head to bolt, and it's hilly ground we shall be going over to-day. You will certainly be risking your life, if you persist in riding her. Oblige me by changing your horse."

"Mr. Avondale, you are indeed very kind, but the risk is ample temptation to make me adhere to my resolution. Besides you are so occupied that I wonder you can find time to ask a lady such a slight favour as that she should not break her neck."

"Florence, Florence, what are you saying?" cried Edith; but before anything could be added to soften down the harshness of the reply, Mr. Vrynne, accompanied by Fernie, joined them. To the latter Avondale nodded distantly, to the

former he said, "Mr. Vrynné, the horse Miss Vrynné is on is very vicious—I have been trying to persuade her to change it—don't you think she had better do so?"

"I did think so, and Sir Arthur and myself begged her to take another horse, but as Florence turned a deaf ear to our expostulations, I can scarcely imagine she would listen to advice from any one else."

Mr. Vrynné spoke much more coldly than his wont. Avondale was greatly pained by the tone, but he could return no reply, and so, without venturing another look at Florence, who was with difficulty keeping back the tears, he rode off to Exmoor and Stuart Jardine.

They had had two runs but had lost both foxes. The field were now coming along the top of Rawdon Hill. This is a long ridge which everywhere goes down rather steep to the plain, and which for some 400 yards of its side ends in a precipice, 50 to 100 feet high, of sandstone. The summit of the hill is open, but about its foot is a considerable quantity of brushwood and several patches of the same are found elsewhere about it

and on the edge of the precipice. Out of one of these patches the hounds started a fox which made across the precipice and down the hill beyond. Some of the company were cantering along the base of the hill, but the greater part were on the summit.

The former joined in the pursuit, so did the latter slowly and cautiously on account of the steepness—but only for an instant. There was a sudden cry of dismay. Miss Vrynné's horse had broken loose and was speeding after the hounds in a direct line which led straight over the precipice. No help was near, for, even before she was noticed, she was many yards in advance of any other rider. The field pulled up horror-struck; for human aid was useless as the mare could not now stop her headlong career were she to perceive the danger. The ladies shrieked.

“Oh God! my daughter, oh, my daughter,” groaned Mr. Vrynné.

On, on flew the horse, bearing itself and its hapless burden to sure destruction; on, on to the cruel sharpened rocks that many a yard below

were waiting their prey. Several of the gentlemen spurred forward, but what the good?

Suddenly a rider appeared, urging his horse along the very brink of the precipice. He rode madly, and as Miss Vrynné was evidently pulling her own horse's head round, there was the shadow of a chance—the shadow and no more, for in all probability, supposing the gentleman should reach her, the shock of the collision would carry both animals and both riders together over the precipice.

“Avondale, Avondale!” arose.

“Thank God,” exclaimed Sir Charles Popworth, “Avondale's son can save her, if any one can.”

All gazed intensely, scarcely breathing. It seemed an eternity while they watched. A few more strides and Florence Vrynné would be a mangled corpse; and a few more strides and Avondale might pluck her from the jaws of death, the two riders approaching almost at right angles.

But Avondale was too late—would have been too late, if Miss Vrynné's horse, seeing the yawning gulf before it, had not on the very edge

of the chasm thrown itself half round, and attempted to remount the hill. But it could not, the impetus was too great, and an instant only it staggered on the brink with its head turned up the hill and straining to save itself from destruction. The moment, thus gained, however, brought Walter to the rescue. He dashed by holding tight the left rein of his own horse to keep him up the hill, and with his right arm raised the rider from her saddle, her mare simultaneously rolling over the precipice, where it lay, back, leg, and several ribs broken, till a shot put it out of its sufferings. A cheer burst from the whole field, and all hastened forward to meet Avondale, who, having dismounted, was slowly walking up the hill and was joined by Edith and Stuart, who had been but a few yards behind him. Florence was pale but unhurt, and joy was dancing in her eyes. Her father tried to express his thanks, but could only grasp Avondale's hand.

“A wonderful escape,” said all, as they surrounded the rescuer and praised and commended him.

"I was afraid," said Lord Whatcombe, "lest you would be entangled in the stirrup, even if Avondale were in time."

"I had withdrawn my foot," replied Florence, intending to throw myself off, "but hearing some one coming, I determined to take my chance."

"Well, Avondale," said Exmoor, "what will be your next performance. But," *sotto voce*, "excuse my hinting, it is probably owing to you that the catastrophe was so nearly happening. There is, my dear fellow, something or other amiss. Take my advice, and get matters explained; if you are in fault, don't be so foolish as not to confess it."

Many of the meet took dinner at Avondale Hall, which was close by. Lord Whatcombe and Earl Frescheville could not, as it was a considerable distance to Whatcombe, and a carriage was waiting for them. Lady Jessie had been very *distracte*; her good-bye was of the briefest, and it was not for some months that Avondale saw her again.

Next day, in obedience to Mr. Vrynne's earnest invitation, Walter and his visitors went over to

Brentwood to lunch and dinner. Mr. Vrynne showed Avondale how heartfelt were his obligations, but he said little, because he saw that some change had come over his young friend, and he anxiously awaited an explanation which he could not demand. He had at first attributed it to politics and ambition, next to Lady Jessie Frescheville, but observations of Lord Whatcombe satisfied him, partially at least, on the latter point.

Miss Vrynne met Walter in one of the rooms.

“I owe you an apology, Mr. Avondale, for my rude speech yesterday morning ; will you pardon it, please?”

“It is I, Florence, who should ask forgiveness for my incivility to you, but it has been entirely unintentional. I really have not, if you will believe me, wished to be unpolite,” said Avondale, very earnestly, and longing to add more.

“You have not spoken to me much this Christmas, Walter ; but I know you did not mean anything,” replied Florence, drawing nearer.

“But you are so engaged now, that I look upon you almost as one of the giants who the old people say inhabited the Vale.”

“I hope I am, at least, not a very hideous one; not a regular man-eater.”

“Oh, no, I don’t think so,” she replied, looking into his face with a smile, and then casting down her eyes with a blush. “But I have not yet thanked you even for saving my life. How brave and gallant you were, and how good after what I had said an hour or two before.”

“Don’t praise me, Florence. I did only what every true man would do had he the same opportunity; but, indeed, I was so glad it was I and no one else who saved you.”

Avondale was most glad; but, when he started to the rescue, it was not so much the hope of saving Florence as it was with the expectation that both would be carried over together, and strange that the thought was, for the moment, pleasurable—that is, not that Florence should perish, but that death would unite them.

“And I was very glad, too.”

There followed a long pause; Avondale was

ashamed to confess his position with regard to Clare Campion ; nor would he throw off the chain that bound him to her. Then, Florence, in some embarrassment, and with quivering lip added—

“ Because our fathers have so long been friends.”

The conversation continued some minutes longer, till the first dinner bell enabled them to separate ; Florence well-nigh weeping, Avondale well-nigh suffocated with his emotions. Florence and Edith were both very silent during the dinner and afterwards, when Avondale and his friends departed. Mr. Vrynné addressed him in the library very feelingly, but, at the same time, very distantly.

“ You have, Mr. Avondale, saved my daughter’s life. I can put the obligation no higher. You were previously aware that you could rely on my assistance for any purpose—you can now command it. If you offer yourself for the next county election you have my full and entire support ; you will, please, take my place in respect of my tenants and neighbours.”

The speaker’s eye was moist, he meant all that

could be implied in the last sentence, and he hoped for some acknowledgment, but Avondale gave no sign beyond stammering out an unintelligible repudiation of any act beyond what manhood compelled.

As they drove back to Avondale, Florence's face, as Avondale saw it when she said good-bye to him—good-bye, he believed, for ever—paler than it had ever yet been, haunted him; and again the words rang in his ear—"and may be madness to both."

His brain was in such a state that it would be madness to him, at least, if he remitted work. They returned to London next day. He purposed writing to or calling upon Clare Champion, and asking her to release him from his vows; but how could he commit such an act of baseness? It would be insufferably mean and dishonourable. It would be doubly insulting her whom he had already insulted by the very act of winning her affections. Ere he could decide, all need for decision was removed by a letter, received a fortnight later from his sister, in which she stated that the report was confirmed that Sir Arthur

Fernie was to marry Florence in the summer, and that Florence was on the point of leaving Lyddonshire for a warmer climate, in order to avoid the cold winds of the next three months.

BOOK VI.



N E M E S I S.

N E M E S I S .

CHAPTER I.

AVONDALE had succeeded. The nucleus of a party—a party rather—had been originated. It was not yet consolidated, nor had it assumed a definite crystallized shape, but time would do that, and day by day it—the Wharfedale section—was gaining greater strength and greater cohesion.

Full credit, ample justice was given to Avondale by his associates for his exertions. He was a successful man ; his energy was prodigious ; incessantly was he at work. But he now discovered that he possessed emotions as well as intellect. Clare Campion, Florence Vrynné were ever before him. Both images were ever present in his moments of relaxation. He could not forget the former—he longed, with a yearning that was

ever increasing, for one more look on, one more word with the latter, before they were parted for aye.

Parliament had been opened, rather late, the 10th February, a few days prior to which the list of new creations came out—in it our friends Earl Frescheville and Percy Mulgrave as Duke of Belfast and Baron Kilcoe, of Kilcoe, co. Cork, respectively.

In the speech—a document which, thanks to Mr. Rowe's logical intellect, was nearly free from bad grammar, but which, also, thanks to the same, contained two or three sentences which had no meaning, or any meaning according as the reader twisted them about—her Majesty was pleased to inform “My Lords and Gentlemen” that “Ireland was comparatively quiet, save those parts which were in a state of disturbance, and the relations with the Colonies were satisfactory, save in those cases where they were not—that trade was brisk, save in those branches in which it was dull, and the people were prosperous, save in those districts where semi-starvation was prevalent”—and a few other similar bits of news :

that Bills would be brought in in reference to the Church and to Education ; and that a general measure of taxation would be laid before them. The skeleton of this last measure had terrified Kelly, the Chief Commissioner of Customs, and he had resigned ; and thus Rowe was sole Minister of Finance, and one of the improvements made last Session by Mr. Maitland, on his entry into office, was abolished.

The chiefs of the Wharfedale party redoubled their exertions, marshalling and organising their forces ; now the Marquis, now Strathclyde, giving a dinner, and, aided zealously by Lord Hainesbury, strengthening themselves in the Upper House ; while in the Commons the Ministerial outworks were roughly assaulted, and independent members, seeing that the “Talents” were against, rather than with the Government, began to tender their allegiance to Exmoor and Bransdon, FitzHenry and Jardine.

The Marchioness congratulated Avondale.

“But, dear me, he is such a prodigy, that we had better put him into the British Museum, or some such place for public inspection and for

preservation, had we not, Ralph? What did he not do at Waterbridge? Then, at Egremond, he has left a name at which the world grows pale, by taming Sir Henri, and leaping the 'Dead Man's Gap.' Now his energies seem unabated, and to increase with increase of work."

"To which you may add," said Exmoor, "that the other day, at a hunt, he saved Miss Vrynné 'The Flower of Lyddonshire,' from destruction, just as her horse was bearing her full gallop over a precipice," and therewith Exmoor related the occurrence.

"Is Mr. Avondale really himself or some half-a-dozen people rolled into one?" asked the Duke of Strathclyde.

"By the by," said FitzHenry, "Digby has perfectly recovered, it seems. He had rather a hard fight at Leatherton, and the majority, 27, is small, but they won't petition."

"I imagine not," said Exmoor. "His brother has much influence there, besides the Radical element is strong, and he went in heavily for Maitland and Sloe."

"A nice election, that at Scrimmager, a week

ago," observed Strathclyde. "The place was completely sacked."

"Mr. Hardhead made violent speeches," said the Marchioness; "but I suppose the House will be glad to have him back again to enliven them. How is it he is not yet sworn in?"

"He is not dried," said Avondale.

"Not dried—what do you mean?"

"In making his escape from the back of a house that had been attacked by the mob, he plumped down on a water-butt, and said butt's cover being old, he received a complete sousing. He had already imbibed a fair quantity of mountain dew to keep up his courage, he now took a great deal more to counteract the effects of the immersion, and he thus got so thoroughly drenched in the two liquids that, though they put him in front of the furnace fire of the steam packet by which he came over, and have since kept him in the drying room at one of the big laundries, he still drips, drips; and it is reported that some days must elapse before all the moisture is evaporated."

Mr. Hardhead's misadventure caused consider-

able merriment. Then Avondale asked Mrs. Bransdon a riddle—

“Your mentioning Sir Samuel Simpkins reminds me of it. I think it’s a pretty good one. It was given to me the other day. ‘Why is a man’s bald head—our sex alone possess such a characteristic—like Paradise?’”

No one could tell. “The answer is not mine, though the rhyme is—

‘Because it’s raised above this earth, a bright and shining spot,
Where mortal partings are no more, and dy(e)ing is forgot.’”

“Very good! very good!”

“But that is not all. And where, as Wigan would say—

‘Where, though eternities shall run, and age on ages roll,
No more again shall w(h)ig be seen to hang about the poll.’”

CHAPTER II.

THE Wharfedale party tried their paces by preliminary canters in each House. In the Lords a debate on the state of Ireland was opened by Lord Hainesbury. It went on three nights considerably to the discomfiture of the Ministry, though not so distinctly in favour of Wharfedale as he could have wished, since he rather seemed to be playing into the hands of the Tories. Bayswater, of course, spoke for his own side, but he left the new peer, Kilcoe, to sum up the defence. This was to him a most serious undertaking, and he bungled terribly. He began—"Mr. Speaker—no, I mean Lord Chancellor—Sir—that is, my lords, the Government are taking active measures for the protection of life, and, above all, of property in Ireland." This was enough. The Lords, not excluding Mr. Speaker, that is the Lord Chancellor, or the Duke of Bayswater, laughed,

if they never laughed before. It will, probably, be enough for the reader also—he can imagine the rest of the speech. Wharfedale did not push for a division.

Next evening, March 1st, in the Commons, Jardine commenced an attack upon the Colonial policy of the Cabinet, and an animated debate ensued to the manifest advantage of those with Jardine ; but neither was this pushed to a division, lest the result should be the placing the Tories on the Government benches.

Thus affairs in Parliament grew lively. There was a split amongst the Liberals, that was plain ; people wondered to what it would lead. The more far-seeing, who could perceive the tactics of Wharfedale and his section, could perceive also that it was a risky game they were playing, it was a course requiring consummate tact and discretion to ensure success. The problem was this—given 350 Liberals and Radicals, of whom 100 were personal friends of the Ministry, and 50 were doubtful, and 300 Conservatives, of whom 250 were sworn adherents of the Earl of Wigan, and 50 were very doubtful—how to devise matters

so that the 50 variable Tories could be made to work with the 200 independent Liberals, and the combined bands should both hold in check the other Liberals and Radicals, and defeat the Tories? This, it will be conceded, was most difficult. Besides, the independent Liberals had first to be "instructed" to know themselves as forming a body, and to recognise their leaders. This was done partially. During the course of the Colonial debate Jardine had assembled from 50 to 60, and expounded to them his views, which received their full concurrence; and Bransdon had done the same to a similar number before putting a question to the Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs, touching the treaty with Schlumpfgfheim Gebrgcherg, which had been negotiated the preceding year.

But what more than all else showed the strength of parties were two divisions on motions brought forward by the Tories. The first was on some piece of stupidity of Blocke Head's, scarcely worth while to particularise it, as all his performances were of the same character; but, I think, it was because he pardoned a fellow guilty of a

brutal murder, on the ground that "he was the only son of his grandfather, and that his step-mother had, when a child, once assisted at the drowning of a litter of puppies, and this fact might have produced in her a propensity for the destruction of life generally, which propensity she might, from long residence with her step-son, have transmitted to him, and so have rendered him at times unable to control his actions." From the division the Wharfedale chiefs absented themselves, but they sent sufficient of their followers, and only sufficient, to turn the scale for the Ministry, the numbers being for them 247, against 235, showing that about 150 were standing neutral.

The next was a motion, two days later, on some legal point. On this occasion, partly to show their numbers, partly at the special request of Kerr, the Wharfedale section attended in full force; and into the Government lobby went 372, into the other, 241, the majority, 130, being all independent Liberals.

"I don't think we need complain of the division," said FitzHenry to Jardine.

“Decidedly not ; it shows the strength of those whom we may fairly call our own party, who look to us rather than to the Government for direction.”

“We number,” observed Exmoor, “from 120 to 150, who are unswerving followers of the Marquis. This is as many as Engländer, apart from the Earl of Wigan, can rely on.”

“But to these must be added at least another 100 of the Liberals who would prefer Wharfedale to Maitland, and the Earl of Cotteswold’s 50 to 60 Conservatives,” added FitzHenry.

“We must contrive to get Cotteswold,” said Jardine.

“Ah, here are the Marquis and Bransdon,” as these were ushered into the room.

“Plenty of time yet,” said Avondale. “March is barely begun. We shall have some hot work about the Education, or Church and Education—which ever it is to be styled—Bill that Tintern introduces on Monday. If the Government survive that, the Budget and the general measure of Taxation will follow, and there the Ministry will receive the *coup de grâce*. I don’t think it would be advisable to open communications with the

Tories till the first Bill is settled. We hold the guiding strings. We can pull them, and make the other two parties knock each other about. If they destroy each other on the Education Bill, we step into office over their corpses. If not, we must join the Earl of Wigan in defeating the Budget; but we must act carefully, and absorb the Tories, not be absorbed by them. If Maitland has to resign, he would rather see Wigan than the Marquis, Premier."

"True," said the latter. "You have extraordinary discrimination, Avondale. I am certain that we can adopt no better course than what you have just pointed out."

"I am of the same opinion," added Bransdon. "I am also very anxious to see Avondale in Parliament."

"So am I," said Wharfedale, "and, now I remember it, I have just heard that Harwood, M.P. for Maesendean, is seriously ill. One, of course, cannot hope for his death, but it might easily occur—he is up in years, and has been rather a fast man in his earlier days—and, if so, Avondale could have that seat. Myself and the Carlton

family own most of the town. You know the place, Avondale ; you went there once in the autumn."

"What do you think of Softhead as Solicitor-General?" asked Bransdon.

"I imagine you can form as good an opinion as myself," replied FitzHenry, laughing.

The others laughed too, for Sir Greenham had come out particularly strong on International Law, in the debate about the Schlumpg, &c., treaty, and had very condescendingly patronised Bransdon for his travels, and for the knowledge he had thus acquired of foreign countries, and their legislation.

"Bother him!" exclaimed Bransdon ; "he is a cad, or he would not in that way have paraded his pet notions. And the House is scarcely the place for a fellow to spout Wheaton and Grotius—give members the references, and they can turn them up in the library."

But the work, the whirl of affairs, the excitement, and, above all, his own gnawing feelings with regard to Florence Vrynné, and the bitter thoughts of the past, and of the future that might

have been, but could not now be—his feelings and thoughts which were rendered doubly gnawing, and painful, by the fact that he could not mention them even to Wyversley, or Stuart Jardine—were rapidly undermining Avondale's health. Sir Charles Popworth, upon whom he frequently called, noticed it, and cautioned him. So did Mrs. Jardine—

“You are doing too much, Walter—you will get ill.”

“Oh, no. It is only just at the present moment a little more exertion than usual.”

“Better run over with me to Rome for the Easter week,” said Stansville. “Ferne—he is a Lyddonshire man, do you know him?—is there, or, rather, will be there at Easter, he is at Mentone now. He has sent me an invite. He is a nice fellow, Fernie. He is going to marry a Miss Vrynné, also from your neighbourhood. He is in raptures over her—I had a note from him this morning.”

The speaker little knew the agony he was causing; but Stuart Jardine did, for, though Avondale's conduct was perfectly inexplicable to

him, yet he was assured that he took more than common interest in Miss Vrynné. He hastened to change the conversation, but hit on a subject not over savoury to Avondale—

“Did you see, mater, a brief notice in this morning’s ‘Constitutional’ of the death of Killarney’s aunt?”

“No. I was not aware he had an aunt—when did it occur?”

“Yesterday afternoon.”

“Does it improve Killarney’s fortune at all?”

“I don’t know.”

“I think so,” said Mr. Jardine. “I heard one day, from Lady Wharfedale, I believe, that Miss Dollmore, under her late brother’s will, received a life interest of £2,000 a year, which, of course, will now revert to Killarney, more’s the pity; and, besides, she has always been very saving, and has property of her own.”

CHAPTER III.

MR. HARWOOD succumbed to his disease, and paid the debt of nature. The Marquis immediately gave Avondale an introduction to his agents and solicitors at Maesendean, whom he directed to assist him with their own private influence but not, in any way, to bring his own name forward—he disliked coercion, and now, least of all, could either he or his chief associates compromise themselves by any act out of which political capital could be made by their opponents. Stanley Carlton, however, was not so punctilious. He was overjoyed to think that he could render Avondale any service, and he unhesitatingly placed his own name—he, of course, could not place his father's—on the committee formed to secure Avondale's election. Two other candidates appeared—Charlton, a large brewer, one of the

Common Council, in the Liberal interest, "to free the town from aristocratic domineering;" and Colonel Graham, in the Conservative interest, in the intention equally benevolent "of rescuing the ancient historic borough from the oppression exercised over it by the Liberals."

"I hope you will be successful," said Lady Wharfedale. "But, of course, you will—such a genius as yourself, so favoured of the fates, cannot know defeat."

"I must not flatter myself too much; I was defeated at Waterbridge."

"But there are not two Waterbridges in England."

"There are, however, some Radicals at Maesendean," observed Ravenshurst; "and you can never be sure of them—they might, out of malice, join Colonel Graham, or Charlton may divide the Liberal voters."

"Radicals are a general nuisance," said Avondale, "and, indeed, something more. You may fairly say '*tres populares, duo stulti, duo nebulones, triaque portenta.*'"

"Oh, pity me," exclaimed the Marchioness,

putting her fingers on her ears. "Such gibberish! has it any meaning?"

"A little," replied Ravenshurst, laughing. "Three democrats, two fools, two rogues, and all three monsters to be looked at from a distance."

"Avondale is not far wrong," said the Duke of Strathclyde, "the probability being that the third one will be both a fool and rogue."

"The probability? The certainty you mean, on Avondale's reasoning," said Ravenshurst.

"We must thank Carlton for the activity he is showing," observed Wharfedale. "I am quite surprised at it. I wish Brayclift could be brought round, too, but there is no chance."

"None whatever," said Avondale. "His whole fortune is staked on the next Derby, and I fear the morrow of the race will see him a ruined man."

"Wyversley owes you much," continued the Marchioness. "He is altogether changed, and his mother is coming up soon, and she will re-open Walton House in something like its former grandeur."

Avondale was glad to hear this, but the thanks were not entirely due to him, though he could not deny them. The Marquis knew a little of Wyversley's habits, but he had no time to make close enquiries. Besides, the young Earl had almost got rid of his old associates, and was paying considerable attention to his duties as a peer; and, therefore, Wharfedale, who had heard some of the reports as to Wyversley's infatuation for Auricoma, little suspected the depth of that infatuation. He deemed it a boyish flame, which would soon burn out, and would become altogether extinguished, when Wyversley should meet the being appointed him by fate. But it was no boyish flame, as Avondale could easily have told him. It was a strong, clear fire, which could be put out only by means of some great catastrophe scattering its embers far and wide, or by the removal of the fuel that fed it—not by its own weakness. Avondale was greatly concerned for his friend. He saw Wyversley daily approaching nearer the calamity, for averting which no means appeared. He was suffering enough on his own account—the information incidentally given him

a week before, by Stansville, had completed the measure of misery—but he could still spare regrets for Wyversley's folly.

"I am sorry, however," said Ravenshurst, "that my sister won't come up this season, or if she does, only for a few days. She is tired of society, she says, and is going in strongly for Sunday schools and old women's clubs."

"I am very sorry," said Lady Wharfedale. "I hope she will change her mind; perhaps she may, when she hears of Lady Wyversley's intention."

"I hope so, but I fear she won't. You know last year she came up late, after Easter, and had almost determined to stay away altogether."

Could Ravenshurst have guessed the thoughts of one of his hearers he would not have spoken quite so coolly. Go where Avondale would it seemed as though he must be reminded of his passion and its consequences. He preserved an unchanged countenance, but apparently the pallor increased, for Lady Wharfedale, a few minutes afterwards, observed—

“You are not well, Mr. Avondale. Do you see how white he is looking, Ralph?”

“Yes, my dear, and I have begged him not to work so hard. You must find out some young lady for him to act as a counter attraction to politics; do you know any one likely to suit?”—this in a pleasant tone of banter.

“No one, unless—” and with lightning speed there flashed through her mind a faint suspicion which caused her to hesitate. Then she continued, “what would you say to one of the Misses Simpkins, Mr. Avondale?”

There was a laugh.

“That would be hard lines on him,” said Wharfedale. “You must stay a week at Maesendean to recruit yourself, Avondale.”

“A pretty way to recruit himself,” said Strathclyde, “bothering about a contested election.”

Next morning Avondale left for Maesendean; it had been thought best that he should lose no time in opening his canvass. It was his birthday. He received two presents, both directed in female handwriting. One was from his sister, the other was not. It was a small bunch of

violets enclosed in a slip of paper, inscribed,

“Walter Avondale, M.P. for Maesendean,

“Forget—be happy, but not faithful
True to thine ownself, not to other.”

He recognised the writing, the gift, the sentiments. The sender would release him from his oaths, but what use now? And would the release sweeten the reflection that he had gained the affections of her whom he had ceased to love?

Jardine accompanied him to Maesendean, as would Wyversley but for the breach of privilege; Stanley Carlton was already there, putting forth a wonderful amount of energy. They stayed there some days, but, of course, called no meeting, published no address till after the burial of Mr. Harwood. Then one or two assemblies, and a little canvassing enabled them to decide that Avondale would certainly be elected if the other two candidates did not coalesce.

CHAPTER IV.

THE Education Bill was introduced on the 6th March, nominally by Lord Tintern, really by Mr. Rowe, who was much better acquainted with the subject than his lordship, and who would have been a far abler Minister of Education than of finance. "Church and Education" Avondale preferred to style it, and this was the better designation, for it was a most heterogeneous measure

"That shape had none,
Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb,
Or substance might be called that shadow seemed,
For each seemed either."

By this extract Bransdon fitly characterised it on the second reading. It dealt with Church as well as with Education, and it was impossible to determine which was the substance, which the shadow, whether the intent were to bring home

instruction through the agency of religion, or *vice versâ*, to the masses of the people ; whether it was an insidious attempt to raise the *status* of Dissent or destroy that of Episcopacy. Bransdon sought an explanation of the medley by referring the draft of the Bill to the diverse tendencies of the two gentlemen who took it in charge, to Rowe's freethinking and Tintern's orthodoxy, spiced by Muddler's desire—who, by the by, would put a word in everywhere, and being cousin or brother-in-law to about a dozen M.P.'s, could back up his request pretty strongly—by his desire that “hinfants should 'ave han hoportunity hof hacquiring hat han hearly hage han helementary huseful heducation.”

The first reading was assented to on the 10th March.

That afternoon there was, at Mr. Jardine's, the first open muster of his party. Close upon a hundred attended. Jardine said a few words ; he was tacitly recognised as their leader in the Commons. Then, at greater length, spoke Herbert Williams upon the defects of the measure as regarded its direct object, Education ; and Sir

Edward Pilgrim, who was loudly cheered, as regarded the indirect object, the relation of the Church to the State and to Nonconformists. Three or four others of the general assembly next put forth their ideas ; then Exmoor followed, expressing his opinion that if the Bill survived to Committee ("it won't, it won't," was shouted) it must be greatly modified ; and Wharfedale briefly and pointedly summed up the debate.

The second reading was appointed for the 22nd. Meantime all parties braced themselves for the struggle ; the Ministry fully awakened to their danger—the Tories once more catching a glimpse of the Treasury benches, and of themselves seated thereon—and Wharfedale's adherents completely alive to the difficulties of their position, to the risk they were under of losing the fruit of all their exertions by allowing Wigan and the Conservatives to slip in and occupy the seats vacated by Maitland and his section.

Negotiations and intrigues became the order of the day. The Earl of Wigan tried to win over Jardine, whose opinions and his own were one on the mode of governing our Colonies, and

.

Sir Henry Kerr, in favour of whom Lord Wyre, his son, offered to waive his pretensions to the Presidency of the Indian Board ; and the Duke of Beaulieu, another prominent Tory, tried the same with Exmoor ; but neither accomplished more than the betraying the hopes and fears of his own side.

On the other hand, though Maitland shut himself up in gloomy grandeur, Rowe opened communications with his old associate, Jardine, giving him the choice of either the Home or the Colonial Office, and Jardine returned the compliment by telling Rowe that on the change of Government he should be rejoiced to see him retaining his post as Finance Minister. Bayswater, too, laboured to secure Bransdon, who “ preferred the Foreign Office to the Irish Secretaryship,” and FitzHenry—“ we will turn going Claybourne ; make him a Commissioner in Bankruptcy.”

“ It would suit him well, but I have an innate horror of serving with Greenham Softhead.”

“ You would be Attorney, of course, and if Softhead objects, we will make him a Master in

Chancery, or send him to one of the County Courts."

"It would be more than he is worth, but I could not desert Sir Edward."

"He could take the Woolsack; Brentwood is getting old."

"Then, besides, I have a slight objection to the Premier," which objection, unfortunately, could not be got over, though undoubtedly had Bayswater been endued with the gift of prescience, he would, when Wharfedale resigned, have resigned with him.

Not alone the political world, but the whole of England as well, was in a state of commotion. Merchants talked in the same breath, of leather and Dissenters, tea and school boards, wool and Church government, guano and education. Bankers asked Mr. Blank one minute, "if he were aware how short his account was running?" and the next, "could he form any idea of the actual force of the new party?" Brokers confused scrip, and stock, and mining shares with politics, just as in the Bill, religious and educational clauses were mingled in inextricable chaos.

The excitement increased as the debate on the second reading proceeded. It became manifest to all, and to none more clearly than the leaders of the three sections, that the division would determine the fate of the Cabinet, and that that division would itself be determined by the action of the Wharfedale party.

Avondale returned from Maesendean on Lady Day. On the 28th the debate was, after seven hours' talking, adjourned till the following Monday, on the motion of Exmoor, Jardine having also to speak. The next evening Avondale dined with Jardine.

"You have a good chance, Walter, according to what all three of you say," observed his host.

"I believe so, if Charlton and Graham don't coalesce."

"Even if they did, you would beat them," said Wyversley. "You have promises from nearly half the voters."

CHAPTER V.

IN the drawing room Avondale was glad to see Wyversley seat himself by Mary Jardine; he noticed the slight colour that rose to that young lady's cheek as she made way for him. He hoped, indeed against hoping, that a similar feeling might be aroused in Wyversley's breast to that which had evidently been aroused in Miss Mary's. He had, as I have already mentioned, thrown the two together as often as possible. Mr. and Mrs. Jardine liked the good nature and the generous disposition of the young nobleman; they were pleased to see him labouring with Avondale, and to have him a visitor at their house, though they were utterly guiltless of ulterior designs; they had no idea that Polly, so vivacious and active, who chaffed every one and laughed at sentiment, could by any possibility lose her heart on an intercourse of a few months

—they did not suspect the truth now, and Avondale was uncertain whether even Alison, the eldest daughter did, she being so much engaged with her charities and with her own little romance.

“You must be a great magician, Mr. Avondale,” said Mrs. Jardine. “You have metamorphosed Stuart and Mr. Carlton. I could scarcely recognise either.”

“Say rather some one else has metamorphosed them,” said Alison with a smile. “I had a letter from Edith this morning—don’t blush, Master Stuart. I was only going to observe that she did not even thank you for all the zeal you were displaying in her brother’s cause—perhaps, indeed, she was not even aware of it.”

Avondale, too, had had a letter from Edith, in which she told him she had heard from Alice Popworth that Sir Arthur Fernie was at Mentone with Mr. Vrynné, and was to marry Florence in the summer. She besought him most earnestly to tell her what was the obstacle, and allow her to write to Florence, or to write himself to Mr. Vrynné before it was too late.

“She loves you, dear Walter, indeed she does ; and you did love her. What is it that is now separating your souls ? If it is any fault of yours don’t be too proud or too ashamed to confess it—don’t, don’t, my brother. Mr. Vrynné always wished for the marriage. So does papa, and he is very much fretting about it. So did Florence ; it was her sole desire. But if you give no sign she cannot now withdraw. Her self-respect will prevent her. She cannot allow the whole county to say that she offered herself to you and you refused her. Oh, Walter darling, don’t consign her and yourself to a life of wretchedness.”

The appeal went home to Avondale. Nevertheless, despite the agony he was enduring, despite the misery before him, he could not resolve to ask Clare Champion to release him. The Avondales had ever been true to their promise—probably there was a spice of perversity and obstinacy in their nature—and he, durst he be the first to make oaths and break them, to confess himself false, forsworn, base ? Clare Champion had a day or two ago told him to forget ; but it was her reason, not heart, which spoke,

for she had asked him to think of her for a year, and not half of it had elapsed. He would wait the year, come what might, and then pray her forgiveness.

“Ah, that explains matters,” said Mrs. Jardine, smiling, as she replied to her daughter’s observation. “Perhaps a similar explanation would apply to Mr. Carlton.”

“It would not; Carlton is a muff,” asserted Stuart somewhat unreasonably.

“Don’t be absurd or ungenerous, Stuart,” said his mother. “Nor vicious,” added his sister.

Avondale laughed, but Mrs. Jardine noticed how wearily. “You are unwell, Walter. I know you are, I am anxious about you, I shall write to your sister.”

“No need, thank you,” said Avondale. “As soon as the election is over and we learn the result of Monday’s division, I shall take it easier.”

“I hope so, but I do not see how that is to be brought about. If you are in office the cares and troubles would harass you quite as much.

However, no doubt that just at present you have more than a usual amount of work."

"At least you must not get knocked up before next Thursday," said Stuart. "Half London will be at Lady Wyversley's first ball, and if you the—the—what shall I say?"

"Incomparable," suggested Mrs. Bransdon.

"Yes—incomparable, are absent; it would inflict the bitterest disappointment on all the young ladies who are dying to make your acquaintance."

"Dying in more senses than one," added Mrs. Bransdon. "Have you noticed that Kate Vandeleur's hair has resumed its natural tint?"

"Yes," said Mr. Jardine, "the fair damsel's locks have recently changed from yellow to nearly black. I was rather amused at the change. I am rather surprised that Sinclair cares a bit for her now; he must have heard of her proceedings."

"He does care, and that very much, or he would not have exchanged into the regiment that has come home, as such an arrangement is

always expensive; and he has persuaded his father to permit the marriage."

"Kate may congratulate her good fortune in escaping Killarney," said Mrs. Bransdon.

Avondale had left them to say a few words to Mary Jardine about the ball.

"Killarney is a thorough *roué*," observed Jardine.

"He is a thorough cad, I believe," said Wyversley.

"Is he not to be married soon?" asked Mrs. Bransdon.

"I believe so," replied Mrs. Jardine. "Miss Dawson has returned from the South of France, where she has spent the winter. I saw her last Tuesday in the park."

"It is lucky for Avondale," said her husband, in a low tone, "that he escaped her, though he did not at first take kindly to it."

"What!" exclaimed Mrs. Bransdon, surprised, "did Miss Dawson refuse Avondale for Killarney?"

"Something very like it."

"Why the girl must be mad."

“I am of the same opinion,” said Mrs. Jardine.

“It is regularly a case of ‘*quem Deus vult*,’” added Mrs. Bransdon. “But there is no accounting for tastes.”

CHAPTER VI.

MONDAY came. The proceedings of the Wharfedale followers were settled, chiefly according to Avondale's counsel. The heads of the party met at Wharfedale House, and agreed, when the division should be taken, to withdraw from the House, and leave Tories and Maitlandites to fight the battle out. Some objections were made to this course, but Avondale's reasoning overruled them.

“By so doing we shall not play into the hands of the Earl of Wigan. Probably not over 200 Liberals will be left, and certainly not 250 Tories. Our followers won't be much under 200. This, taken with the fact that we are Liberals, and in opposition, may not impossibly induce her Majesty to send for the Marquis of Wharfedale.”

This arrangement was laid before a general

assembly of them, convened an hour later. No one could think of a better proposition.

The evening came—a crowded, excited House. Exmoor commenced, Rowe followed; less important members continued the debate; Jardine, Englander, Maitland concluded it. Englander, with his usual cool assumption, assumed all the credit of originating the opposition. The Speaker put the question, and the Wharfedale party, pursuant to their agreement, withdrew amid a tempest of cheers and counter cheers. As the last of them filed out, it became patent to all who remained, and to the Peers and strangers present, how the voting would result. Tories and Liberals went to their respective lobbies—then all returned; and the numbers were handed in by the Tory teller—for the Government, 224; against 244. The cheers and groans were renewed uproariously. After some minutes, with eyes flashing, and hands clenched, and in tones that trembled with rage, Mr. Maitland moved an adjournment till Thursday.

No need to speak of the satisfaction of the Marquis and his friends.

“It is owing almost entirely to you, Avondale,” said the Marquis. “I am sorry Lady Wharfedale is not here to offer you her congratulations, too. She was summoned to Egremont this afternoon by the sudden illness of the housekeeper, to whom she is much attached. And you say you are going away to-morrow—you must certainly be back before Thursday.”

“Yes, most decidedly.”

They parted. Killarney was standing by. A sneer curled Avondale’s lip as he recognised him in his paint; a savage and a meaning gleam shot from Killarney’s dull eyes, and he observed the sneer.

CHAPTER VII.

To explain the cause of Avondale's journey to Lyddonshire, we must go back somewhat. We have said that Avondale went to Clair Street somewhat oftener than he ought to have done. His chief incentive was to escape the dulness and the growing regret that would seize upon him during his long winter evenings. The Maison d'Or was ever well attended, though its attendance was not of a peculiarly high or intellectual character—ever brilliant, though its brilliancy was tinsel and false glare.

But Avondale was perfectly content not to look below the surface; he sought company, life, movement, he dreaded solitude and rest; and he found what he sought, or, at least, a substitute for it, at the Maison d'Or.

Brayclift and his Grace of Glenlivat were often there, but the first's income now was merely

what his mother allowed him out of her life-interest of £5,000 a-year, and the latter would, ere the season closed, be reduced to the same, or rather to a worse predicament—he had no mother to fall back upon, and when his own estates were gone, all would be gone. Many another cadet of good family was there, some, like these two, wilfully wasting their patrimony; others, like Avondale, wasting merely their odd moments and odd coppers. The son of the millionaire *parvenu* was there—Hardman, whose father was promised a baronetcy if the Tories got into power—Higgins, whose grandsire had kept the little marine store shop in Walworth Street, City, which his son, now Sir Thomas and an Alderman, and a resident in Eaton Square, had transformed into the immense warehouse of Higgins and Co.—Dobson, who never had a grandsire, whose father's history went back no farther than the time when he was promoted from a crossing sweeper to be an errand boy at Messrs. Scraper, Stingy, Saveup, and Co's.—*et hoc omne genus*. And with them were not a few who eked out a subsistence by cringing to them, and flattering

their follies, as never does menial flatter and cringe to the most exacting master.

Two of the most regular visitors were Talbot and Captain Dawson. The former was developing his bad points more and more, to the exclusion of his good ones. He was not abandoning himself to headlong dissipation—he was too careful of his money to squander it on others, though he might on himself. He was rapidly becoming a complete *roué*, in the worst sense of the word—mean, cunning, sensual, and contriving to get the fullest amount of pleasure, *i.e.*, brute enjoyment, with the least expenditure of cash ; and it was very strange that Avondale should have consented to associate with him on any terms. But few saw him in his true colours—he was, perhaps, a little bit coarse, but that could be attributed to the exuberance of animal spirits.

Captain Dawson was, as the reader knows, the cousin of Miss Dawson. There was much of Talbot about him ; much of his coarseness and vulgarity, more of his prudence and cunning ; and, what the other was almost devoid of, considerable personal courage. He disliked Avon-

dale, why, it would be difficult to say, and the feeling was mutual. He hated Wyversley, because that nobleman, deeming him a cad, simply ignored his presence, and because Auricoma had refused him admittance at Lilybank.

Wyversley several times remonstrated with Avondale for going to Clair Street at all, and especially with having anything to do with either of these two. It was a strange inversion of affairs, Telemachus lecturing Mentor.

“ You really should not, Walter, ever visit the place. It may compromise you seriously.”

“ Oh, no, I have no fear of that. As soon as the winter is over I shall give it up.”

“ Why not at once ? ”

“ Because I get ennuyed out of my life during the long evenings.”

“ But that ought not to be, with your prospects and hopes. You are looking miserably out of sorts, but I don't think it can be simply the work you are doing. Is there any hidden trouble? Anything in which I could be of the slightest service to you ? ”

“No, nothing particular. I dare say I shall pitch on my feet all right some day.”

Avondale could not tell his friend his secret grief; nor would he take his advice. He still went to the *Maison d'Or*. He could beat any one there at billiards—Stansville was, perhaps, his nearest match—but he was not so successful at cards. He was a good player, but he almost invariably lost, never matter what the game, when Wyversley or Talbot was his partner, though he very generally won against these. He was inclined to suspect cheating, but neither himself nor Stansville could detect any unfairness or juggling.

“A mere coincidence, I suppose,” muttered Stansville.

“A remarkable coincidence,” said Stuart Jardine, who occasionally accompanied them.

So matters went on till the death of Mr. Harwood.

“Now, Walter,” said Wyversley, “you must shut up your account with Clair Street.”

“I suppose so, but I wish I could fairly make out this mystery about the play.”

“Pooh, don’t trouble yourself about that. How is it it always rains when the wind is from the West?”

“Because, my dear fellow,” replied Avondale, smiling, “that wind, as you are well aware—that particular wind comes over a large track of ocean. Your example does not bear out its implied conclusion. There is cause and effect in it—do not the same exist in the other case?”

“Well, even if you did find the cause, *qu’importe?* You could not prosecute the rogue; it would be like fighting a chimney sweep. But seriously, you must not go to this hell any more. It is getting rumoured about. Exmoor this morning mentioned it to me very significantly. Of course he knows well enough about my little weakness, but he meant much more than he said when he told me. ‘Wyversley, you are, I hear, getting a regular gambler, quite a sharper in fact; and Avondale too—but I presume his name is by mistake muddled up with yours. Do you always win or always lose, Wyversley?’”

“He would imply that the report is I am a swindler,” exclaimed Avondale, greatly excited.

“I will find out the cause of what you style a coincidence.”

“You cannot. Don’t go there again, Walter.”

But Avondale would go, and did go the night after his return from Maesendean. Delancourt accompanied him ; and again he and Wyversley and he and Talbot lost.

“Strange ; but I am convinced it is nothing more,” said Stansville.

“So it may be or not,” added Wyversley ; “but I have seen the last of the place.”

“No—come with me once more,” said Avondale. “Next Saturday—the Saturday before the division. I must then, perforce, abandon Clair Street.”

So they went for the last time ; but Avondale could not find out the mystery, if any there were. Dawson and another fellow, a hanger-on of the place, were opposed to him and Talbot. He had been drinking a little ; so had Dawson. He got excited as he lost, as did Dawson as he won. High words arose.

“Dear me,” exclaimed Dawson, sneeringly,

“Mr. Avondale cannot really be such a genius as ever to ensure success.”

“Success, at least a fair proportion of success, if there were nothing underhand,” broke out Avondale.

“Underhand; on which side? Rather remarkable—I wonder it has not been observed—that you always lose with, and win against, your darling associate, Wyversley, and my friend, Talbot.”

“What would you insinuate? Speak out, that I may give the lie to it.”

“Nothing, nothing whatever. I only fancy some people’s friendship may be purchased a trifle too dearly.”

“You are insinuating, Dawson, what cowards like you are afraid to say.”

“Oh, no, not afraid, sir; I can protect myself, though my father found it difficult to do the like for himself on one memorable occasion some few years back.”

The taunt did its work. Avondale had faintly heard of a fight or a quarrel between his father and Mr. Dawson, in which the latter was very

roughly handled, and even uglier rumours of attempted murder had reached his ears.

“Liar!” he shouted, springing forward, intending to fell the reviler; but Delancourt, Wyversley, and Jardine held him, while others—for many had crowded round to hear the altercation—did the same for his opponent.

“Let him come,” hissed Dawson as furious as himself. “Let him come, the modern Crichton, whose sense of honour is so nice that he can coolly lure his friends on and get them to lose heaps of money, and then say that others cheat. He is the best card player here, and yet he always loses when his partner is a man who can pay—there’s honesty for you; and then he talks of underhand dealing—there’s morality. Let him come. We are equally matched. There’s plenty here to watch, and it’s light. My father was in weak health when he was attacked, and it was in a dark lane at night, with nobody near. Who’s the rogue, the swindler, but yourself? No wonder you are so skilful at politics when you favour us with such specimens of your craft here.”

Thus Dawson went on, while Avondale raved in his friends' hands, to get at him. Those that were there assured him they did not believe a word of Dawson's assertions, he being probably drunk. His friends saw him home, and he resolved to go to Lyddonshire on Tuesday morning, and get an explanation from his father of the charge made by Dawson. A miserable Sunday and Monday he spent, for he almost thought that as he passed through the streets men pointed him out as being the knave Dawson had declared him. Wyversley saw him Monday morning.

“Don't fret about this, Walter.”

“Dawson has blackened my character.”

“No one believes him. Even if any did, it would be merely the frequenters of Clair Street, and their belief won't affect you in the eyes of society. Run down and see your governor, there's no harm in that; but be sure to be back by Thursday. I shall be dreadfully annoyed, and my mother will be much grieved if you are absent from the ball. We are to have such a lot of people, and you will be looked upon as the hero of the hour—you must be there, my dear

fellow. Meanwhile think no more about Dawson than I do.”

But he could not help thinking about him, and about his damning accusations, and thus a further weight was added to the load of trouble weighing upon him.

Avondale returned to his chambers in the early morning of Tuesday, after the division, with the intention of having a few hours sleep, and leaving by the first fast train.

On his table was a telegram from his sister, dated seven o'clock the previous evening :—

“Papa badly hurt, and is insensible—fallen off his horse—come at once.”

This took from Avondale all possibility for sleep. Between him and his father existed a strong affection which, under any circumstances, would have rendered their eternal parting most painful. Now was added to that grief the thought that his father might be dead before he reached him—before he could obtain any explanation or refutation of Dawson's statements.

His state of mind cannot be described, as he waited while the minutes slowly passed by, till

six o'clock, when he took the first train for Lyddonshire. He reached Newbury by ten o'clock, and drove thence to Avondale Hall. Arrived there, his father he found in bed, but not dangerously hurt. His horse had stumbled, caught another foot in a hole, and then rolled over, pitching Mr. Avondale some yards, who had fallen on his back and head. He remained insensible till near midnight, but no bones were broken, and the doctors predicted that, thanks to his strong constitution and temperate habits, a short week would see him out of his room again.

His son's arrival gave him great pleasure, and he went to sleep for a few hours, and woke up quite refreshed, so much so that Walter Avondale, anxious to get back to town the next day, ventured to mention to him the occurrence at Clare Street, and to ask him, if strong enough, to let him know exactly what Dawson referred to.

Mr. Avondale's recital cleared up the mystery, and put his son's mind somewhat at rest. Briefly, it amounted to this—

“Many years since, Dawson's father occupied Thorpe farm. His landlord allowed him to shoot

the ground game, and he took advantage of the liberty by shooting mine, and even poaching in the preserves whenever no one was about. I warned him several times and summoned him once, but he got off. He retaliated by assisting three or four of the biggest poachers in the neighbourhood, and, finally, shooting two of my retrievers, and poisoning others of the dogs. I had no proof of this, but it was currently reported in the neighbourhood, and Dawson, when slightly drunk, more than once boasted of it at the village public. The death of my dogs made me perfectly savage, and I rashly told my men that if ever I caught Dawson on my grounds I would shoot him. A few days afterwards, about 9 o'clock one evening in June, I was going round the west plantation, when I heard some shots. We hurried in the direction, and saw two men in the dusk running away. I went after one, who seemed like Dawson, the keeper after the other. I soon gained on my man. He rushed through a hedge, I close behind, with a double barrel, one barrel loaded, which caught among the thorns, and went off.

The bank was steep the other side—Dawson had fallen down, and before he could be off again I was upon him. He raised his gun to strike me with it, but I was too quick for him, and knocked him down, and, as he fell, his gun went off, lodging the contents in his side. He was taken home, and died in the night. His brother, the present man, then a little trader, came down—declared that I had murdered him—employed a solicitor at the coroner's inquest, and did his utmost to get me convicted, but the jury, and I believe everybody in Lyddonshire, were satisfied as to how the affair had happened. That is one, and the chief reason, why Dawson and I are not, and can never be, even acquaintances."

This was ample explanation for Walter—so it would be for his intimate friends—but he could not persuade himself that Dawson might not be able, to others of his acquaintances (and there were plenty who were envious of him) to put a different view upon it, and to make them sceptical of its truth.

As it was finished, a telegram arrived, which added to his entanglements, and made him say

he must return to town by the first train next day. It ran—

“From Wyversley, Walton House, Durham Square, London, to W. Avondale, Avondale, Lyddonshire.

“Mischief afloat—Wharfedale greatly enraged, why, I know not—return at once—the party will else break up.”

I have mentioned that Killarney saw on Monday evening, or rather Tuesday morning, Wharfedale and Avondale part at the Houses of Parliament, and heard the latter say he was going from town that day. In the evening his lordship called on the Marquis, the result of which call was that Wharfedale conceived a sudden and most intense hatred of Avondale, the result of which change of feeling was the above telegram.

CHAPTER VIII.

AVONDALE slept little that night. What could the message refer to? What mischief was afloat? He racked his brain again and again, but could give himself only one answer, and of that answer Lady Campion was the burthen. By some means his insane passion must have been brought to light. There could be nothing else which would have estranged the Marquis. This, this alone, must be the cause. How often he cursed his folly! His prospects blighted, his hopes utterly dashed, the cup of success torn from his very lips. All owing to a woman—to his own impetuous feeling—and against those very feelings he had been earnestly cautioned. That he, whose tact and foresight had contributed so much to the impending downfall of the Ministry, to the change of the Government of a mighty empire, should lose the fruit of all his patience, and determination, and *finesse*, by a few weeks', a moment's,

yielding to a pure infatuation—that he whose head was so clear, and his intellect so penetrating, should have been unable to control the heart—the thought was maddening. He could not lie still.

He got up and paced the room in an agony of remorse and vexation. His breast was torn by conflicting, though intermingling, currents. Love for Florence Vrynné was one. The more clearly he recognised their eternal separation, the more bitter and poignant became his grief. Ambition, perhaps, predominated, but it was quite impossible to compare the two. He could have replaced Miss Vrynné's image by the splendid future that had been gradually unfolding before him, but now this resource was removed, and nothing remained for his mind to feed on but self-reproach. The world would point to him with sneers and scorn. His brain seemed on fire—he grew almost beside himself. It may appear strange that he should have allowed one overpowering idea to have such complete mastery over him. But so it was. At last, after some hours' tossing, the tempest that agitated him

sank down, and about four o'clock he fell into an unquiet slumber.

He woke up much calmer at seven, snatched a hurried breakfast, and drove to Newbury to catch the 9.30 express for London. The motion of the train soothed him and restored his mind to its equilibrium. He could reason with himself more coherently. Might he not last night have too hastily drawn a conclusion from the telegram. Such notices are necessarily composed very briefly. Had not this very briefness been one cause of the great effect it had produced on him? Had not its sudden arrival, immediately after his father's narrative, given it an unreal importance? Perhaps other causes, altogether different, had acted on the Marquis—perhaps all his apprehensions were ungrounded, arising solely from a guilty conscience. This, however, could scarcely be; something must be wrong. Was Clare Campion the cause? His conduct in reference to her had, doubtless, been very reprehensible. They both had broken through the regulations of society and the ordinances of morality, but was there not much, very much, excuse? For his

own fault he was prepared to atone in the only manner possible, should opportunity be offered. His passion had died out, passed by rather, as an April cloud flits across the sky; but all his sympathy for the woman remained. If it were this which had aroused the anger of the Marquis, he would at least palliate his error, though he could not attempt to defend it.

And if excuse and palliation were refused, he would not yield without a struggle. He had built up one party—he would build up another, even if the task required years for its accomplishment. But could there be no other cause? The existing Ministry, or some of its members, would be rejoiced to see a split in their opponents' camp; and they probably would hesitate at little short of actual treachery and fraud to accomplish such an object. Might they not have contrived some means of doing so? Then again, Killarney owed him no good-will. Would not he be delighted with the chance, should it be presented him, of poisoning the ear of the Marquis? Conjecture after conjecture thus passed through his mind till he arrived in the metropolis.

After taking his luggage to Granston Street, he went at once to the Earl of Wyversley's. He was at home and at lunch ; his countenance was serious above its wont.

"I am glad you have lost no time, Walter. I fear my message has startled you somewhat—you appear haggard."

"Very probably. You know, I have been working almost too hard lately, and my mind has been on the stretch for three days. What is up? Let me hear it all."

"I am afraid I cannot give you much information. Sit down first, and take some refreshment. I dare say you have eaten nothing to-day."

"Not much. I am too eager to learn anything you have to tell me to feel hunger now. Pray let me hear it at once, Wyversley."

"Well, this is all I know. Yesterday Ravenshurst was lunching here—why, what ails you, my dear fellow?"

At the name Avondale had started, shaking the table violently.

"Nothing—only my head is throbbing, and every now and then a sharp pain shoots through it. Go on."

He half filled his tumbler with brandy, and drained it.

“That won’t improve the headache, Walter,” expostulated his friend. “You had much better lie down and take a cooling draught. Ravenshurst was here, I said. When I came into the room I noticed that both my mother and he were unusually solemn. During the meal few remarks were hazarded. Towards the close I chanced to mention your name in connection with the election at Maesendean. Ravenshurst had been looking very gloomy, and he now spoke in a most sneering tone.

“‘I wish Mr. Walter Avondale all the success he deserves.’

“‘So do I most unfeignedly,’ I said. ‘But, excuse me, Ravenshurst, your manner plainly belies your words.’

“‘Not unlikely. I may have caught it from your intimate friend, little as has been the communication between us.’

“‘What in the world do you mean?’ I exclaimed, rather hotly, I dare say.

“‘Don’t speak quite so loud, Reginald—you have not caught that from your *confrère*—ill

manners and duplicity are evidently not connected. I mean simply this, that this plausible young gentleman has taken advantage of his intimacy with certain families to inflict on one of them a deadly outrage, that immaculate as he may be, he has not been content simply to employ his friends for his own political aggrandisement, but has also filled up his leisure moments by cultivating the virtues of a Don Juan—and with great success. I might add that I have also just heard he has been your chief instructor in cards and dice, and the other amiable weaknesses to which you have given way.’

“‘You may add,’ I retorted, ‘that your informant is a consummate liar.’

“‘Allow me to thank you on his behalf. I will add also, that the Marquis of Wharfedale will at least save himself from the chance of again suffering from Mr. Avondale a repetition of the gross outrage which that honourable individual, that very spotless and promising genius, has offered him, by breaking off all further connection with him.’

“Pardon me, Walter, I am simply repeating his

words—I am as truly grieved at the terrible insinuations as you are.”

“Never mind me—continue,” spoke his hearer in a hollow, smothered tone.

“He went on,—‘last night the Marquis sent down instructions to his agent at Maesendean to withdraw all support from his nominee, and to inform the tenants, they were to use their own free will.’

“‘An abominable shame,’ I said.

“‘I don’t think so,’ replied my mother, ‘you are not aware of all the facts, Reginald.’

“‘What are the facts then?’ I demanded. Further reply Ravenshurst refused.

“I left the table at once after Ravenshurst, and hastened to Wharfedale House. The Marquis was not at home, and did not, in fact, return till near five o’clock. I told him my errand, and begged to be informed of the ground of your offence. Wharfedale was in a viler temper than Ravenshurst, and scowled frightfully as he listened to me. He gave me no information, but replied savagely—

“‘Lord Ravenshurst is perfectly correct. The

person with whom you have been so intimate, and in whom I have taken such interest, is a scoundrel of the deepest dye.'

"I remonstrated; he cut me short. 'Excuse me, Wyversley—the world says you have had so much experience in the crime of which this, this man—he would not pronounce your name—is accused, that probably you would not comprehend its full atrocity. Oblige me by letting the topic drop, now, and for ever.' Seeing I could get no further answer, I sent the telegram off directly."

Avondale had listened as in a dream to the latter part of the recital. Clare Champion was plainly in some way or other the source of the whole affair; but beyond this all was wrapped in obscurity—unless, and the mere idea struck like a cold chill through his frame, unless from some unaccountable cause it may be against the Marchioness, and not against her, that suspicion pointed. Yet this seemed altogether improbable. Between Wharfedale and his wife the most unbounded confidence existed—he could not, he dared not distrust her in the slightest degree.

But the expressions of Ravenshurst referred distinctly and unquestionably to an intrigue with a woman, and what construction could be put upon the words, "the Marquis will save himself from a repetition of the gross outrage," taken with the allusion in that nobleman's own reply to Wyversley? There seemed to be but one conclusion, and that conclusion caused him the bitterest agony.

As Wyversley ended, he arose. "I must see the Marquis immediately—he is under some horrid delusion."

"Yes, decidedly—it will be the best course. My mother is gone out, or perhaps she might give you some hint, though I regret that she, too, is prejudiced against you. The ball comes off this evening—you are, I know, invited—and she will, of course, return shortly. I have been expecting her every minute, but I don't think you should waste time by waiting."

They went to Wharfedale House. The Marquis was "not at home."

"What that means, I cannot determine," said Wyversley.

“ You must curb your impatience till to-morrow morning, I fear—you will be certain to secure him just after breakfast—or, stay—he will be at the ball to-night. We will seek him out there, and oblige him either to give you an interview in one of the rooms, or to name a convenient time. It is most important that matters should be cleared up as soon as possible. Do try to get cool, my dear fellow. You look perfectly ghastly. Shall we turn into the park ? ”

“ I would rather not. I have no wish to meet any acquaintance while in this state. Besides, the report of the split is doubtless already spread far and wide, and will afford the town some hours’ wonder and conversation. To have happened now, when everything is playing into one’s hands. To-day Maitland is to give his answer in the House ; perhaps at this very moment he is tendering his resignation to the Queen ; he went to Windsor this morning. Damnation ! I have made all the arrangements, worked up the Cabinet, and now at the very last moment all my exertion is stultified, and I am become a byword and a laughing stock. The

fiend himself must have invented the tale, and prepared people's minds for its reception."

"Walter, do not be so excited," expostulated Wyversley. "You are beside yourself; you will become crazed. Go back to your rooms and try to get two or three hours' sleep."

"I will; it is the best I can do till evening. I shall come to the ball, though if Wharfedale is not present shall not stay long."

CHAPTER IX.

ARRIVED at his rooms, Avondale was unable to compose himself. He felt convinced that Lady Wharfedale's good name was in danger of dishonour, and the thought caused him unutterable grief, while, for the Marquis himself, he was scarcely less concerned. Both had been most kind and considerate to him, they had received him on terms of the closest friendship; they had counselled, assisted, advanced him in every possible way; and for recompense he had returned, so one at least thought, the basest ingratitude. The hours dragged by very slowly. He would have called on the Jardines, but they might have heard of the report, and what explanation could he give them, or any one else, of it till he had seen the Marquis. He was most anxious to hear Maitland's speech, but dread of meeting any one he knew prevented his going

to the House. However, a late edition of the evening papers told him about eight o'clock that Maitland had resigned, and had recommended Her Majesty to send for the Earl of Wigan.

“Wigan and Englander and the Tories in office once more,” he exclaimed as he scanned the paragraph. “That is a nice stroke of policy on the part of Maitland ; but if Wharfedale will hear me, I trust we can foil his purpose. Wigan is too old ; he cannot last long, and if he were dead how would Wyre and Englander agree ? How will they agree in the Commons ? Why this party must, from internal disorder, break up in a week or two—that is, supposing a Cabinet can be by any chance formed out of it. But they cannot form one without help from us. Oh, if Wharfedale will only be true to himself and me.”

He dressed with more than customary care for the ball. He arrived at Walton House rather late, and the rooms were already well filled, a brilliant company having assembled to do honour to the Countess on her return to society. Avondale had been there some time, and had met many

acquaintances, though not either of those he was especially in quest of—the Marquis and Wyversley. He had not yet seen the Countess, for he instinctively hesitated to address her till he had first met Wharfedale; and he had not joined in any dance; it was impossible for him to attempt to assume a smiling countenance. While hesitating whether to remain or not, he came across Mrs. Jardine and Stuart.

“The very man,” exclaimed the latter. “My mother is somewhat overpowered with this hot room; could you, Walter, kindly take her to some cooler apartment? We were seeking the conservatory, but you know the way better than I. But, Walter, how unwell you look!”

“With pleasure,” replied Avondale.

“Wyversley’s study will be the quietest place; any servant will show you the way.”

He offered Mrs. Jardine his arm, and conducted her to a room which opened into the conservatory. Wyversley used it as his study, it being next the library, with which it communicated by a false door. Mrs. Jardine recovered herself in a few minutes, and then remarked Avondale’s paleness.

“You must be ill; when did you return from the country? Stuart said you went down two days since.”

“This morning.”

“And what is this sensational rumour as to your quarrel with Lord Wharfedale?”

“I can scarcely say. I have come here to-night chiefly to see the Marquis, but he is not present.”

“I hope it is nothing serious.”

Avondale did not reply. From the moment that they had entered the room the murmur of voices had been heard in the adjoining conservatory. They gradually grew louder, and the words more distinct. Avondale caught a few words, and they arrested his attention. One of the voices was a woman's, and as Mrs. Jardine made her last remark, it said, clear and distinct as the thunder clap that breaks the stillness of a summer night—

“You are quite jealous, Sydney (Killarney's Christian name). He and I lived near each other in the country. I probably flirted with him for want of some better amusement, and he—his father

is one of the better class of farmers—doubtless liked me pretty well—that your lordship will, of course, acknowledge was very likely to happen—and my father's property much better. Our parents, however, were not friendly. I never heard the reason till the other day, when I learnt that his father, a man of most violent temper, years ago tried to murder mine one night, and escaped punishment only from want of evidence."

The tones died away as the speaker withdrew from the study, but not a syllable was lost on either of the hearers. Avondale's face became perfectly ghastly with the concentrated agony that it exhibited. Each word struck on his brain like blows from a club. He quivered, but could not obtain a momentary oblivion by fainting; his frame was too strong. He turned half mechanically as if to walk away, then reeled, and finally sank down into the nearest seat. He could not speak; his tongue seemed swollen, and was choking him. He could not weep; his eyes were dry, their moisture sucked up by the fierce heat that was pervading his frame. Mrs. Jar-

dine gazed at him in deepest commiseration, and hung over him with a mother's tenderness.

"Walter, my dear boy," she entreated, "do not be so dejected; bear up, it will kill you else. Don't, don't let those words so distress you. You do not care for her; don't think of what she says. Oh, it was most cruel and heartless; but you have many friends, and you will find some true woman to comfort you."

Stuart Jardine came hurriedly in while she was speaking, and naturally was surprised at the sight.

"It is that horrid girl," said his mother. "The odious creature! she is a fiend, not a human being. Oh, Walter, try to recover yourself. Don't stay here longer. Stuart shall accompany you home."

Avondale rose, but he staggered like a drunken man.

"Sit down again," said Mrs. Jardine, "while Stuart takes me back to the ballroom, and he shall return at once."

Avondale did, and Mrs. Jardine left him half crying, for she valued him next to her own

children. Stuart was back in a few minutes. As he entered the room several others came into the library. Through the false door every word could be heard. They had come to see a piece of old armour, but passing events formed the topic of conversation.

“I am not surprised that Wharfedale has kicked him off, he has been spunging there long enough,” said one.

“He has not been spunging. He is a young fellow of genius, and comes of a good family,” objected another.

“His grandfather was an M.P. years ago,” added a third.

“What difference does it make?” said a voice that could easily be distinguished as Talbot’s, “that a man’s grandfather was in Parliament. Good family! why Dawson says his father is a farmer, and his genius is as good at leading on young Wyversley to the gaming table as it is at politics.”

Avondale stood erect now. His cheek was flushed, and his eye was bright; and Stuart Jardine, who had heard enough from his mother

to explain the previous scene, was alarmed at the savage pleasure that lit up his countenance. He threw open the door, and stepped lightly, pleasantly into the midst of the group. Several recoiled, for there was that in his face which denoted mischief.

“ Captain Delancourt, I am extremely obliged to you.”

He wheeled round on to Talbot. That unfortunate personage, who, though somewhat shorter was far stouter and heavier, literally quailed beneath his glance.

“ You damnable cad !” and he seized him by the collar and shook him as a terrier shakes a rat. “ Has any fellow here a riding whip ?” he asked.

“ I have,” said Delancourt. “ I happened to put mine in my overcoat, as I not unseldom carry it instead of a cane—it is good gutta percha.”

“ Will you oblige me with it ? I dare not let this fellow go, to fetch it myself, or he would, probably, run away. Bring him a walking stick ; he shall have fair play ; and some one stand in the next room to keep off intruders.”

Delancourt brought the two weapons. The

whip was handed Avondale, and the stick to Talbot; but the latter seemed as though paralysed, and made no attempt to defend himself. Avondale thrashed him till he writhed with pain, and roared for mercy.

“Down on your knees and confess to all that what you said about me was a heap of lies, and that I have gone to the house you alluded to very generally at your solicitations.”

Talbot did so, being in abject fear; and, indeed, others present dreaded whether their turn would not follow next. They never before, or later, saw rage so personified as then in Avondale. The confession duly made, he said—

“Now hide yourself from the sight of all honourable men, and be thankful you have got off so easily. Were it not that it would be sheer brutality, I would give you a final cut across the face, to leave there a mark similar to what you have attempted to put on my fame.” He scanned the others, but could not determine whom he had heard the first. “Some gentleman said that the Marquis of Wharfedale had kicked me off, and that I had been spunging there long

enough. Apart from the question of the good taste of thus speaking of an absent person with whom you are unacquainted, I may inform the speaker that the first part of his observation, if not a complete lie, is, at least, altogether premature. Secondly, spunging is not the term to be applied to my connection with that nobleman. People sponge who borrow money on every possible opportunity, and on every conceivable excuse, and forget to repay it—don't they Lewis?" addressing these last words to that impecunious individual, and glaring at him, as if suspecting him to have been the speaker in question.

"Hang it, Avondale," replied Lewis, hastily, "I did not say anything about you, and was most grieved that any one did."

"So, doubtless, is the fellow who is standing, or trying to stand, by the door there. Had you not better take yourself off, sir? Delancourt will, doubtless, make your excuses to Miss Villiers,"—rather a bitter sneer this, as Delancourt and Talbot were rivals for that lady's hand.

"I am extremely sorry, Avondale," said one

of the group, "but it was I who spoke the words that have rightly angered you. It was said heedlessly—I scarcely know why. But nasty reports have been current about you the last week or so; how they have arisen I cannot tell; but there can be no stronger denial given to them than the horsewhipping Talbot has received, and the confession he has made. I offer you any apology a man can in honour offer."

"Thanks, Beaufoy. I regret that you should have listened to idle tales, but you and I have not yet been personally acquainted, and so you might have mistaken my character. Good evening, gentlemen. You will oblige me by saying nothing about the present occurrence—Talbot bears an honourable name, which should not be disgraced."

He left then. After walking a few yards in the open air, he said to Jardine—

"I feel wretchedly dizzy, and pains keep shooting through my head that almost stupify me."

"Had you not better see a doctor?"

"Oh, no. It is only the excitement I have

gone through lately. If we see any chemist open I will get a composing draught."

"Yes, that would be advisable. If all the places are closed, we can get a mixture at Rowdon's, a little way on. I often get stuff there, and so, I dare say, he won't object to being rung up, even if he is gone to bed, which can hardly be, as it is not yet twelve."

Mr. Rowdon opened the shop door himself, in response to their ring.

"My friend's head is aching badly," said Jardine, "he wishes for something to send him to sleep."

"Excuse me, sir," said Rowdon, touching Avondale's forehead. "Ah—let me feel your pulse—a little nervous excitement."

He poured out small quantities from two or three bottles, looking keenly the while at Avondale, whose face was much flushed, and who kept pressing his head with his hand. He asked him as to his symptoms, again touched his brow and temples, and then advised him to step out into the street—

"You find this place rather close — Mr.

Jardine will overtake you in two or three seconds."

As soon as he had left the shop, Rowdon leant forward and whispered to Jardine—

"See your friend home immediately, and get the best medical advice! This draught won't hurt him, if it does him no good. He has brain fever! and may be delirious before morning."

Jardine started,—“Good God! I was half afraid so.” He hurried after Avondale, and they walked sharply to his chambers. A fire was burning, and, by the glimmer of it, Jardine saw on the table a large square envelope, stamped with the Wharfedale crest. Avondale not perceiving it, he took the liberty to put it in his pocket, feeling sure that its contents could not but affect his friend, in his present state, disastrously. He persuaded Avondale to take some of the mixture, and to retire at once. He shook hands with him, and exclaimed as he did so, “Why Walter, your hand is burning—you must be ill. I cannot leave you till some physician has seen you.”

Avondale raised no objection—it would have been the same if he had. Jardine went directly

to their family doctor, who, after seeing Avondale, said—

“Nothing very particular—you may, however, take another portion of this, pointing to the bottle; and you must not get up to-morrow till I have seen you.”

But, having left the bedroom, he confirmed Mr. Rowdon's statement. He rang for the housekeeper, and told her that some one must sit up in the adjoining room all night, and that he would send an experienced nurse in the morning.

Jardine hastened back to Walton House. His mother had been wondering what had detained him so long, and was terribly shocked to learn the cause. She quitted the ball as soon as possible, and drove to Granstone Street, to satisfy herself that Avondale's housekeeper had made all proper arrangements. She next sent a telegram to the nearest night office, to be forwarded the first thing the next morning to Newbury.

Meanwhile, the ball went on with undiminished gaiety. It was, as we have said, on a scale of unusual magnificence, and was largely attended. The Marquis of Wharfedale came about the time

Avondale withdrew. He had, before dinner, sent the note to Avondale which Jardine had appropriated. It contained a curt refusal to hold further communication of any kind with our hero, and it would, of course, have reached him long before he left for the ball, but for some delay in its transmission.

Politics formed the staple of conversation, rather than the common petty scandals of fashionable life. Avondale's absence was remarked, and freely commented upon ; and the early departure of Mrs. Jardine attracted some attention—the more so as her husband was not present—both were taken as signs of the way political currents were running. Stuart remained with his sisters, but had no opportunity of speaking to Wyversley, who was greatly astonished to find that his friend was absent.

Lady Risborough was surprised at the non-appearance of her son, said son meanwhile rolling on his bed, trying to find out the softest spot for a body covered with wheals. The spectators to his thrashing, of course, kept the matter a perfect secret ; but of this Talbot was totally unaware,

and, consequently, his bodily sufferings were intensified by mental tortures, and by the thought that Delancourt would seize such a favourable opportunity of urging his suit with Miss Villiers. This latter supposition was perfectly correct, for Delancourt, though he felt bound not to divulge his rival's misfortunes, did not feel equally bound to resign the advantage thus placed in his way, and the result was, that ere the ball was over, the lady, mortified by the manifest neglect of the one admirer, had approvingly listened to the protestations of the other.

CHAPTER X.

TRUE enough, as the doctor had said. Next morning Avondale's mind was wandering, and, by the time his sister arrived in the afternoon, he was in a high state of delirium. Next day his father, though still very weak, and not recovered from his accident, came; and, either he or his daughter, was constantly by the sufferer's beside.

Their anxiety cannot be described in cold language. Mr. Avondale called in Sir Edward Johnson; but that famed physician's skill was powerless. "The patient's life depends, under God, on his strength of constitution. His brain has evidently suffered a most severe strain. You say he has been most abstemious—that is most fortunate, and will add greatly to his chance of recovery."

So, day after day, the father and daughter watched the couch of him who was so very dear to both, till, at length, they saw him gradually sinking.

BOOK VII.



D A W N .

D A W N .



CHAPTER I.

BUT none the more did political manœuvres come to a standstill, though the Wharfedale party missed the guiding hand that had hitherto, if not openly controlled, at least secretly directed their proceedings. On Wednesday evening the Marquis informed Exmoor, Kerr, and Strathclyde, who were dining with him, of his determination to get rid of the services of Avondale. They were immensely astonished and concerned, but forebore to press an explanation, as they saw it would be distasteful. Next day, about four o'clock, he received a notification from Windsor that his attendance would be required there at noon the following day. He immediately got together his chief supporters, and laid the communication before them.

"Where is Avondale?" was soon asked.

"Mr. Avondale and I have severed connection," he replied. "I believe it will be necessary for us to proceed without the assistance of that young gentleman."

"Why so? If it is not an impertinent question," enquired Jardine.

"For private reasons, which, suffice it to say, cannot be examined by any one but myself."

"But, my lord, this is not altogether a private matter. Mr. Avondale has been engaged most assiduously in it—some marked acknowledgment is due most certainly to him. Are you under any mistake? I can scarcely think that he can so suddenly have aroused your animosity."

"He has not aroused my animosity in the sense you take it,—but he has given me reason to say I will hold no further communication with him by word or letter."

"I imagine, Mr. Jardine," said Strathclyde, "that this expression of the Marquis's resolution must satisfy you that he has just grounds for it. It is plainly a private matter, which, even I, who am so much more intimate with Wharfedale, would not presume to inquire into."

“With all due deference to your Grace, it does not satisfy me. There must be a mistake. Have you seen Mr. Avondale since this occurred? He is out of town now, but will be back this evening.”

“No, sir, I have not; and I am determined not to see him.”

“Excuse me, my lord,” said FitzHenry, “but may you not be under some misconception? The wisest of us may err—and this, whatever it is, had not transpired on Monday.”

“Excuse me, too, gentlemen,” replied the Marquis, very hotly. “I have given all the reasons I intend to give—I will not further be cross-questioned—and I am perfectly ready to withdraw, if desired, at once from any further action in the proposed negotiations.”

This, of course, put an end to the subject. The debate was directed to the direct cause of their coming together, but a cloud had fallen over them, and their deliberations were very vague and disconnected. This was not improved when Kerr and Mr. Bransdon, who had left for that purpose, returned to announce the purport of the Premier’s speech.

“He has advised her Majesty to send for the Earl of Wigan,” soliloquised FitzHenry. “It is a good stroke. I almost think we shall need Avondale’s ready wit to devise the best mode of meeting it.”

“Dear me,” exclaimed Exmoor, impatiently, “granting Mr. Avondale to be such a paragon, and I know he has been of wonderful service, still, does all our success absolutely depend upon his presence and support?”

“I hope not—I should think not,” said the lawyer. “But, just at present, it seems to me that we know neither what we are talking about, nor what we are wishing to talk about.”

At last the Marquis brought the conversation to a close, by proposing that they should think over, during the night, the course to be adopted, and the exact line of policy they would select, and meet him next morning by 10 o’clock.

“The train leaves for Windsor at 11.30, and if her Majesty intends to place the reins of Government in our hands, I must be prepared to lay before her our chief measures.”

Most of the assembly went off to the Countess

of Wyversley's. Mr. Jardine walked part of the way with Sir Henry Kerr. Being Scotchmen, they were good friends.

"What can be the cause of the disruption," asked the latter, "between the Marquis and Avondale?"

"I have not the least idea—some miserable mistake, I fear."

"So do I. It can hardly be owing to that report about the gaming table?"

"What report?" asked Mr. Jardine, quickly.

"Have you not heard? Killarney, I think, told me—it seems to be quite common. It is said that Avondale has been leading on Wyversley to gamble at some hell near Regent Street."

"It is a complete lie," interrupted Jardine.

"They go there pretty often, that is certain; and there are ugly rumours about unfair play, loaded dice, and so on. I had intended to ask our friend for an explanation as soon as I saw him."

"That you would be perfectly justified in doing, though the whole story is a lie from beginning to end. You would have, however, to

give him the name of your informant, and that you might object to do.”

“Yes; of course I heard it under pledged secrecy, but Killarney implied every one knew it.”

“Killarney is a mean sneak. He has already done Avondale one bad—or, as I consider it, one good—turn, and now he has seized the opportunity of his absence from town, at a most critical moment, to blacken his reputation.”

Jardine then narrated briefly the origin of the feud between the Irish lord and our hero, adding—

“You know how unceremoniously Avondale cut short his lordship’s pretensions last winter—I do not think it mended matters.”

“Yes, I remember it well; but the rest of the story is perfectly new. But about this report—Talbot, it seems, also goes to this—hell, I suppose, is the fitting designation, and he asserts that both he and Wyversley lose whenever Avondale is their partner. This is a statement which is either true or false, and, if true, should be explained away. It is a pity Avondale has ever gone there.”

“It is a great pity; but I have no doubt he

has done so in the hope of rescuing Wyversley from such a place. You may be surprised at his close intimacy with us, but this will enlighten you;" and he described how Avondale had, at Cambridge, saved his own son Stuart from being thoroughly plundered by a set of gamblers. "He will be back to-night by the last train, and I will see him the first thing to-morrow morning, before coming to Wharfedale House. I trust we shall bring about an immediate reconciliation, for, it is evident to me, that unless we can do so the opportunity for securing power will slip through our fingers."

"Seems very like it. We have relied a great deal on Avondale; and, consequently, this evening, without him, we seemed quite at sea—partly owing, however, to the unfortunate mode in which we opened proceedings."

"Good-night. I don't feel much inclined to accompany you to the festive scene."

Mr. Jardine was still in his study, racking his brain to account for the Marquis's sudden enmity, when a carriage stopped, and he was astonished to see his wife.

“You are home early, my dear—are you unwell?”

“No, but Walter Avondale is returned to town, and is already stricken down with a mortal sickness. Something has arisen to excite the Marquis against him—what he did not tell Stuart. He came back this morning on receipt of a telegram from Wyversley, but has not yet been able to see the Marquis. The agitation and the double journey have been too much for him, and it culminated just now when he heard himself defamed by the girl he had loved, and a friend he had trusted; and the doctor says he has been attacked with brain fever, and will be delirious before many hours have elapsed. That horrid girl! she ought to be knouted—poor Walter!” and she wept pretty freely. Mr. Jardine was inexpressibly grieved. “Stuart took this note off his table before he saw it. He thought, from the crest on it, that probably its contents would only increase his malady.”

Mr. Jardine at once opened the note, and read it, and handed it to his wife.

“Very fortunate Stuart did so. I shall re-

main up till Stuart returns—he may know, or may since have learnt, something more than you have heard. But do you retire, my dear.”

Mr. Jardine was too anxious about Avondale to rest, even after his son had come back from the ball; and he drove to Granstone Street before breakfast to enquire after Avondale.

Afterwards, he went to Wharfedale House. All who had been there the evening before had arrived, and he was the last. His face was so sad and mournful that several, on his entrance, noticed it. The Marquis was glad to see him, and motioned him a seat, but he said, “I will first take the liberty of asking whether this note is from your lordship :—

“ ‘ Wharfedale House,

“ ‘ Thursday afternoon.

“ ‘ The Marquis of Wharfedale is greatly flattered by the honour conferred on him by Mr. Avondale’s call, but trusts that, under no pretence, will the attempt be made to repeat it.’

“ This message is so cruel as to be justifiable

only on grounds of grossest injury—did your lordship send it?”

“You, Mr. Jardine, are, probably, perfectly well acquainted with my handwriting. But I, sir, will also take the liberty of asking by what right you interfere in my private concerns?”

“By the right, my lord, by which a man is always bound to protect the fame of his friend when that friend is unable to aid himself. This night, my lords and gentlemen, Walter Avondale has been prostrated by brain fever”—a general movement and expressions of sympathy—“by brain fever, brought on by over mental exertion in our cause—and the doctor cannot hold out good hope of recovery. Next his father, I am his nearest friend. I owe him more than ever I shall be able to repay, and I am bound to ask the reason why this note was forwarded.”

“And I simply refuse to be dictated to.”

“My lord, has your ear been poisoned by any report as to Avondale frequenting a gaming table, and tempting other young men to the same career. Last night I heard, for the first time, of such a report, and, unhesitatingly, gave

it the lie. Last night Avondale heard a certain gentleman spreading it—a gentleman of good blood and family—and in the library of Walton House, while the dancing was at its height, he flogged the calumniator so soundly that this morning he cannot leave his bed”—(“serve the wretched scamp right,” said the Duke of Strathclyde),—“and also made him, on his knees, confess to the spectators that the story was a complete falsehood. I may add that Avondale, from a feeling of chivalry rare in the present day, in order to save his slanderer’s family from the taint of shame, imposed on the spectators an oath of secrecy. Stuart was one of them, he has not broken his promise by telling me. This is sufficient refutation; but I can scarcely think this the real cause of your anger. If not, will you state it to some one here present—the Duke for instance? By his decision I will be bound both as to its sufficiency and as to the probability of there being some unfortunate mistake.”

“I shall be most sorry for Mr. Avondale’s death, should it occur; but the answer I gave you last evening I repeat now.”

“Then, my lord, I will take this epistle as addressed to myself, and will wish you good morning.”

Mr. Jardine had spoken calmly and solemnly, without the slightest approach to anger, but in tones of profound grief. There was a painful and prolonged silence when he withdrew. It was at length broken, and a few more disjointed observations were made. Nothing definite was or could be settled—the only determination come to was that Wharfedale should, immediately that he was informed of the Queen’s precise views, return to London, and lay them before the chiefs of his party, at a meeting which was fixed for six o’clock that evening.

CHAPTER II.

THEREUPON the Marquis set out for Windsor, his mind scarcely less distracted than Avondale's had been twenty-four hours previously. He dared not credit his wife's infidelity—yet could he disbelieve Killarney's story, confirmed as it was in the main outlines by Ravenhurst? Then he recalled the whole period of Avondale's intimacy with them, and took a species of pleasure in dwelling upon each little incident which added to the mass of damning proof.

Strange that he should have acted so, but thus it ever is, the greater the confidence the greater the mistrust, when once that confidence is shaken. Those who have loved most dearly, if the least breath of suspicion fans them, scrutinise far more sharply than fiercest foes each other's faults, and then "trifles light as air are to the jealous confirmation strong."

But of course he had no clear evidence of guilt, nothing but surmise, however near to certainty the surmise might be. Consequently, in reply to Jardine's appeal, what other answer could he have given? He felt most acutely the position he was in—he was suffering those torments which can lacerate the hearts of high-souled and honourable men alone, yet he was compelled to keep silent, and to allow his friends to put what construction they pleased on his secrecy. All these conflicting emotions completely unfitted him for the task of forming a Cabinet, supposing all his adherents were firm and steadfast, but, already, Jardine had separated himself, and FitzHenry, if not Kerr, might easily follow. He therefore was greatly disposed, when he reached the Castle, at once to decline such an attempt.

Directly on his arrival he was granted an interview. Could he pledge himself to form a Ministry? That was the whole question. Her Majesty had been advised to send for the Earl of Wigan, but seeing how disorganised parties were in the House, and highly valuing his lordship's counsel, she had chosen to summon him first.

Wharfedale acknowledged, in suitable terms, the honour his Sovereign had done him, declared his utmost exertions were at her service, but could not pledge himself. He could, however, give a decided answer that evening. This the Queen accepted; she left him free to choose his colleagues, and would not indicate a preference for any especial line of policy; she simply required that there should be no delay in reconstituting the Government, and therefore a messenger accompanied him back to town, bearing an intimation of her pleasure to the Tory chief, in case Wharfedale should fail to construct a Cabinet.

And he did fail, or rather hastily if not gladly abandoned the attempt. Kerr hesitated, influenced by Jardine's example, FitzHenry and Sir Edward Pilgrim did the same, the Duke of Strathclyde became too confused to clearly comprehend all the circumstances. Bransdon and Herbert Williams mistrusted the ability of their leader. Kelly and Lord Hainesbury thought it would do no harm if the Tories were in office a few months. Exmoor alone was confident and anxious to take upon him the responsibility of

office, though even he could not forbear joining in the chorus of regret for Avondale's absence ; and so, before night, the Tories knew that they were to have another lease of power. The Marquis in person announced to the Queen his regrets for his failure, and he remained at Windsor till next morning.

No need to quote the pæan sung by the "Constitutional" over the good news. "Every art had been used, every manœuvre employed to change the Queen's decision, and to upset long recognised principles. Mr. Maitland, whatever his other failings, had sense enough to know there was but one course open on his resignation—the placing the reins of Government in the hands of the Earl of Wigan. Yet, if we are to believe reports, a most audacious attempt has been made to persuade her Majesty to call to office the heads of a small clique, renegades from both parties, miserable in ability, still more miserable in numbers." So the old woman ran on—vituperation first, her allowance of which she had, apparently, obtained from the twin light, the "Morning Mercury," and next a flood of

twaddle anent the prosperity that must enfold the
land when now

Though trade and commerce, arts, and laws should die,
Once more are seen the old nobility

benignantly watching over and directing the
nation's career.

The "Morning Mercury" well deserved its
popular sobriquet of "cheap and nasty." Its
three "Leaders" were all devoted to politics.
The first was a tirade against the Tories, en-
livened by the spleen of a baulked politician, the
second a tirade against the House of Commons
generally, enlivened by the pleasantry of a
Billingsgate fishwoman, the third was a tirade
against renegades in particular, enlivened by
the humour of an Old Bailey practitioner who
has no case.

CHAPTER III.

WYVERSLEY had been surprised at not seeing Avondale at the ball, but he did not hear of his friend's illness till late in the afternoon, when he called on him to learn the cause. Miss Avondale had not long arrived, and Mrs. Jardine was there, too. She told him what she knew, and he then went to her husband to find out the other circumstances. Mr. Jardine was in great sorrow, and gladly gave Wyversley as full information as he could.

“Wharfedale evidently is of opinion that our friend has been leading you astray, but that is not the sole cause, nor could it be anything like what he heard Miss Dawson speaking about his own family—there must be some deeper reason, and I cannot conceive what.”

No wonder, for Mr. Jardine was a strict Presbyterian, and being himself of irreproachable

morals, was therefore the more ready to credit the rest of the world with a similar character.

“But I believe the reason groundless, and that Walter has been sacrificed to a mistake. And the Marquis, unless I am greatly mistaken, will be unable to form a Cabinet.”

“I will see him at once.”

“Yes—it will be well to do so. But he won’t be back from Windsor yet—stay and take dinner with me ; I am quite alone.”

Wyversley remained to dinner ; and consequently reached Wharfedale House a few minutes after the departure, instead of after the arrival of the Marquis. Kerr had not yet left, and from him he heard all the particulars. “Power thrown away through a mistake,” he exclaimed.

“If Avondale recovers,” said Kerr, “it will be some consolation to him to know what a muddle we have got into the moment we lost his services.”

“It will be no consolation to him—he is far too honourable to feel pleasure in his colleagues’ mishaps.”

It was four o’clock next day before Wyversley

saw the Marquis. He had then been waiting impatiently for him more than three hours. He had been thinking and thinking, but had failed to discover a clue to the mystery. Lady Campion he had at once dismissed—Ravenshurst's demeanour had not been that of a man enraged on account of his sister's dishonour; and besides whatever suspicions he might have as to his friend's intimacy with that lady, not a single fact had ever come under his observation to justify them.

Wharfedale was in an angry mood. He had just looked in at Brooks', and had experienced the mortification of receiving from his political associates and rivals their hypocritical condolences on his failure, the sting of which was increased by one or two observing—"but, of course, owing to young Avondale's sudden illness you were left almost powerless—a most unfortunate occurrence at such a conjuncture."

Wyversley's appearance did not improve his humour; it again reminded him of Avondale, and he said rather sharply—

"Well, Reginald, what is it? I presume you

wish to state your regret and so on. I will take it as said, without troubling you to put it into words."

"Your lordship's proverbial politeness has suddenly evaporated, but you are doubtless suffering from chagrin and vexation. I will come to the point at once—I regret most profoundly your failure, but I have not called on you simply to state this—I have come to ask for an explanation of the cause which has induced you so unceremoniously to break with Avondale."

"The cause I prefer to keep to myself. That should be answer sufficient."

"My lord, pardon me, if I say it is not. I am a friend to you both. If I am indebted to you for care bestowed on my childhood, and I trust I value to the full that care, I am indebted to Avondale for the healthier views of life's duties which I have of late acquired, and for the little resolution and firmness I now possess. As your friend, and as his, I pray you, I beseech you, to let me know enough of this mystery to come to a judgment as to the reasonableness of your anger."

“Your intentions do you great credit, but you must content yourself with continuing in the dark unless your friend himself enlightens you.”

“My friend, as you are fully aware, my lord, lies on a bed of sickness, from which he probably will never arise. Go and stand by it an instant, as I did this morning, and mark the mute agony of Avondale’s sister as she gazes upon the helpless form of her only brother, and vainly looks for the least token of improvement that will not come; and then remember that all this misery may be due to a mistake of yours. Walter Avondale was with me from noon till five o’clock on Thursday; he was in a pitiable state of agitation, and declared, again and again, he was innocent of all ground of offence.”

“I am grieved at the pain his illness has brought on his relations, but am not in the least responsible for it. You are such a chivalrous defender of his that I suppose you will say that he never took you to some hell in Clair Street, and that there has not been such a run of ill-luck on yourself, and on Talbot, as to imply unfair play—unfair play, by which this young gentle-

man has, by an arrangement with the proprietors of the place, considerably benefited."

"My lord," exclaimed Wyversley. "Satan himself must have been your informant—no other could have devised such a neatly adjusted tale. I have lost, doubtlessly, and so has Avondale—to say he is in league with blacklegs! you ought to be ashamed of yourself. And to repeat the legend—it is no better—of Avondale having been tempter to me, or any one else. You are insulting your own good sense by doing so, even if Talbot had not eaten his own lying words on that matter. You are aware that he has not yet recovered from the effects of the thrashing which my friend—my friend, my lord, the emphasis is yours, though I am proud of it—gave him. He was not up when I called at the house to-day, to inform him the first time I caught him at either of the clubs I would repeat the lesson."

"Dear me, Reginald—quite romantic."

"I am glad you think so. And now, after such a high opinion of my conduct, perhaps you will give me the explanation I require."

"Enough of this, Wyversley. I must end the

interview. You are a boy compared with me, but your sense should tell you my years and experience enable me to determine on a course of action without need of advice, much less dictation from others. Will you talk of something else, or shall I ring the bell?"

"I do not depart without the explanation," said Wyversley, firmly.

"You will goad me on to madness, or till I forget myself," exclaimed the Marquis, starting up, and approaching the young man threateningly. "Will you cease your prating, sir?"

It is impossible to say what would have followed had not Lady Wharfedale, unexpectedly, entered the room. She was in travelling dress.

"What is the matter, Ralph," was her wondering enquiry. "I have hurried back to town to congratulate you; but I learn that you are not in office, and, on coming here, I find you and Reginald shouting at each other, and almost fighting."

"Leave us—I have something to say to Wyversley."

"Leave you? Of course, if you wish it; but

why do you speak in that tone, my dear? What is it, Reginald?" she said, appealing to Wyversley.

"Go away, at once," said her husband, almost beside himself.

His wife looked at him in utmost amazement, and then hastily did his bidding, bursting into a flood of tears as she quitted the room.

Wyversley had been as much astonished as herself, but while he listened a gleam of the truth burst upon him, and he comprehended some of the references made by Ravenshurst. As soon as they were left alone again, he said—

"Wharfedale, I believe I can see that you are under a frightful error; and, if you do not give me an opportunity of dispelling it, I will compel an explanation by at once stating my suspicions to the lady you have this instant so grossly insulted."

Wharfedale scowled tremendously, but yielded. "Give me your word of honour never to breathe a syllable of what I tell you;" but even when Wyversley had done this, he hesitated long. At last he said—

“Last November Lady Wharfedale was called to town, nominally by the serious illness of her sister, Lady Carwithen. Two days after Mr. —, this person, was summoned from Egremont to give evidence at Waterbridge. He travelled by the night express on the Great Northern, and went on from London by the one o'clock train for Waterbridge. An hour before that train left Killarney and Ravenshurst had arrived in town by the Midland. As they came out of St. Pancras station they saw my carriage going by, and, thinking I was in it, and returning to Egremont, they directed the cabman to follow to King's Cross. They saw a lady, closely veiled, get out but when they reached the waiting room they could not immediately find her. Ravenshurst could not wait, as he was under an engagement, and therefore Killarney agreed to remain till Lady Wharfedale, as they imagined it was, should appear, and to get her ticket, and see her into the train. When, however, the lady did appear, it was to hail a cab and drive to the Central Terminus. Killarney did the same, and saw her and your friend get into the same first-class

compartment in the Waterbridge train. Is your curiosity satisfied, sir?"

"Perfectly. Good God! what a fool you have been, Wharfedale, to trust such an idiot as Killyarney! a man whose special avocation is to spread scandal, and who is actuated by the greatest venom against Avondale. And how will you ever forgive yourself?"

Wharfedale's expression of rage was changed for one of anxious surprise.

"I was in that train also."

Wharfedale looked a question he did not ask.

"Yes, I was in that train—and, what is more, I accompanied that lady back to London."

Wharfedale staggered as though struck, sat down, and hid his face in his hands.

"I knew that Walter was going to Waterbridge that day, and, being in town—you remember I came up with the Marchioness—determined to go too; but I was not aware of his train, though, as chance would have it, I selected the same. I did not, however, notice him till we changed carriages at Hatton, where I saw him and a lady conversing earnestly. As soon as he

observed me he beckoned me—‘A friend of mine, Mrs. Symonds, wishes to return to town, Wyversley. Will you do me the great favour of attending her back, and afterwards to the Great Northern Hotel?’ I was somewhat astonished, but, of course, did so; and, after seeing my charge to her destination, I came here, knowing that Lady Wharfedale was in town, and spent the evening with her.”

Wyversley added no word of condemnation, for the Marquis was shaken with violent throbs, and it was many minutes ere he could compose himself.

“Oh, Reginald, how can I ever thank you sufficiently for your persistency? What a fool I have been!—what a fool I have been!”

He sought out his wife, and, after some trouble and not a few fibs, he obtained pardon from her for his incivility.

Wyversley waited till they re-entered the apartment together.

“I suppose you may as well come with me to see Mr. Jardine. We must make some arrangements about Avondale’s election, as he cannot do

so himself. Though he is in such a serious state we had better try to get the seat for him—his election would, if he could know it, go very far to assist his recovery.”

“What are you talking about?” asked the Marchioness. “I am not quite certain whether I am in reality myself, or whether the world has not, since the beginning of the week, undergone a transformation. What is this about Mr. Avondale?”

“I forgot to tell you, my love,” explained her husband, “that he has been prostrated by an attack of brain fever, brought on by overwork and excitement.”

“Poor fellow—I hope it is not very serious. When did you see him last, this morning?”

“Yes,” replied Wyversley, as the Marquis was rather in a fix. “The attack is very serious—I will not conceal it from you—very serious; but the physicians trust that his strong constitution will save him.”

“It must be serious if that is all they can say.”

CHAPTER IV.

THEY went to Mr. Jardine's, and caught him at home. He listened gravely to the explanation, which was very halting, of the Marquis, but was impressed by his genuine tone of remorse.

"I trust, my lord, it will be a lesson never again to judge hastily."

"I believe it will. I wish to atone as far as possible for it—how can we best assist his election? I cannot altogether withdraw the notification I sent my agent."

After some conversation, they settled that Stanley Carlton and Stuart Jardine should, on Monday, go down to Maesendean, to conduct the canvass, and that they should acquaint the agent that the notice must be read, not as wishing the tenants of the Marquis to vote against Avondale, but as giving them permission to make their own choice between the candidates. The presence of Carlton was, of course, sufficient to determine the

choice ; for, whenever did English voters, “free” in all respects save politics, and “independent” of all coercion save their landlord’s will, “pure” from every species of corruption save £5 notes—whenever did they venture to oppose their lord’s wish, thus so unmistakably displayed? Jardine’s experience at Waterbridge also did him good service, and Carlton’s future title, and his pleasing manners, gained every body to his side ; and both, from love for their friend—and the former from love for some one else, too—laboured most assiduously. They were also joined by Delancourt, who rendered them much assistance. The Conservative man made a desperate fight, and, indeed, polled the greater part of the voters who were *bonâ fide* of his own view of thinking. Nor would Charlton withdraw—he was greatly delighted when he heard of Wharfedale’s message, and proportionably disgusted when Avondale’s two representatives made their appearance. He had no chance, but he went to the poll simply to prevent, if possible, his return ; for, from the failing so common to human beings, he would

have been better pleased with the success of the Tory, whose principles were directly opposed to his, than with that of Avondale, who was of nearly the same creed as himself. Friday evening, however, the telegraph flashed off to town the numbers—

Avondale, 870 ; Charlton, 392 ; Graham, 557.

CHAPTER V.

EVERY day numbers of cards were left at Granstone Street. The Duke of Strathclyde called often, and the majestic Duchess scarcely less frequently, as did also his Grace of Damnonia; FitzHenry, Kerr, the Marquis of Exmoor, Bransdon, and others were quite as constantly, but Wharfedale was by far the most regular. Twice each day he came in person, or sent a servant to inquire. His remorse now more than exceeded his previous animosity. He dreaded each morning to hear of Avondale's death, of which he must have considered himself the cause. He was in constant terror lest his wife should, in some way or other, become acquainted with his suspicions.

He had at once told Ravenshurst the truth of the case, and that nobleman was equally delighted with himself, and conceived a much higher opinion of Avondale from the moment he heard

of the flogging Talbot had received—this personage, by the by, retired to his father's country seat before Wyversley returned from Maesendean. Both, however, were in difficulty as regarded Killarney—they were well aware of the pleasure it would give him to spread a scandalous tale.

“I dare not see him,” said Wharfedale. “If I did the remembrance of my folly would cause me to quarrel with him, and, then, out of pure spite, he would proclaim the story far and wide.”

“The sole way,” replied Ravenshurst, after some minutes' musing, “to keep his mouth closed will be through the medium of fear. I will tell him that Lady Wharfedale has been informed of your suspicions—I must tell this fib or he would be utterly unable to keep quiet—though she does not know who was the originator of them. I will add that Avondale does not either, but that, if he gets well, he is determined to find out, and to treat the slanderer as he did Talbot.”

This was the only feasible course, and the Marquis reluctantly agreed to it. It succeeded admirably.

"I heard that some one had assaulted Talbot very badly," exclaimed Killarney, "Was it really Avondale, and about this?"

"No doubt of it."

"Dear me, what a hot-tempered young man, and so strong, too. Talbot must be much bigger. He must be very violent—he half-killed Talbot."

"Yes, and the same night he would have wholly killed you, if he could have found out who started the story; and that would have been a great misfortune, your marriage so near at hand."

"I think I will hurry it on, and leave town."

"I would."

"But you are certain no one besides the Marquis and ourselves have the shadow of surmise?"

"No one."

"Then, no one shall hear it from me."

And Killarney kept his word on that occasion, if he never did before.

Avondale, in his delirium, raved continually about politics and the Marquis of Wharfedale,

and their sudden disruption. To the cause of this he was ever referring—"A mistake, a mistake—I will tell him so—yes, I will see him at once—they have been telling lies—and he keeps out of the way, will not speak to me—oh, it is terrible, and my head pains so, my head pains so—I must speak to him—it is all false; yes, false, false, false—and I thrashed one of them soundly, he won't repeat it, he won't repeat it; and he begged for mercy, and confessed it was a lie; begged for mercy, and he had been my friend—friend—but who caused the other report—it was so cruel—I will find out when my head is better, when my head is better—it was she who said it; yes, it must have been—no one else could have guessed it—and she said my father was a murderer, a murderer, a murderer—and I loved her once—oh, she was too cruel, too cruel." So he would go on for an hour together; but he very seldom mentioned any female name, save Florence Vrynné's, and hers not often—even in the height of the delirium he seemed careful to prevent suspicion attaching to either of those of whose honour he was jealous. His

father and sister could only listen with aching hearts and tearless eyes. Mrs. Jardine had been compelled, by their solicitations, to inform them of the fatal conversation which had been the culminating point to Avondale's misery. The Marquis would, now and then, come into the sick room, and try to offer consolation to the father, but he could not long endure the spectacle of the grief which he attributed, in such great measure, to his own perversity. On Friday he appeared much weaker. He talked less, though his words were much more rational, and with that strange sympathy, which, even in sleep, will occasionally affect the soul, his mind was dwelling on his election. Towards the evening he sank into the soundest slumber he had had since his seizure. Sir Edward Johnson saw him, and was delighted with the change. He felt his pulse—it was beating much less violently.

“Twelve hours of that sleep will save his life—and his brain, too,” he added to Mr. Jardine. “I have been as much afraid the attack would end in madness, as in death.”

The telegram came in from Maesendean. Miss

Avondale showed it to the physician, and asked if she might tell her brother, should he fortunately wake up free from delirium.

“I can scarcely say; but I think you may, if he asks about it, not otherwise.”

The patient did wake up next morning about five o'clock, and recognised his father, sister, and nurse who had, for three hours past, been watching by the bedside.

“Dear father and Edith,” he whispered, “you here—then I have been very ill.”

He tried to raise his head, but could not. His father leant over and kissed him; and, after a few minutes, he dropped to sleep again, and dozed till nine o'clock, when he suddenly remembered his election. He asked what day it was—

“Saturday,” replied his sister, and, then, as she noticed how anxious his look became, she added, “don't disturb yourself, darling—you are elected—the telegram came last night.”

His face brightened with joy, and she fetched him the morning paper, and read him the close of the poll. He asked her to put the paper so that he could read the paragraph—it was deci-

dedly the best medicine for him ; and so the doctor said when he arrived a few minutes after. Mr. Jardine followed the doctor, and completed Avondale's pleasure by telling him how grieved the Marquis was, and that all had been explained ; and the appearance of the Marquis directly after confirmed it. But the doctor would not allow them to remain long, for fear of the agitation to the patient ; and he made Edith lie down for the rest of the day.

“ You have not slept a dozen hours the whole week ; we shall have you ill next.”

Stanley Carlton, Stuart Jardine, and Delancourt, “ the three knights errant,” as they were henceforward styled, returned that evening, and were allowed to see their friend for a few minutes. But Avondale did not get well immediately. Thoughts of Clare Campion, and thoughts of Florence Vrynné retarded his recovery very much, and he had one most serious relapse, during which he was again light headed wholly, or partially so, from Good Friday till the opening of Parliament after the vacation.

From that period he steadily and rapidly

recovered. Youth quickly regains strength, and in a little more than a fortnight he had taken his seat and the oaths. Cheers, such as seldom fall to the lot of a young man, greeted him as he walked up the House; for the break up of the Wharfedale party, consequent, as it was generally believed, on his illness, had widely extended his credit, and there were many present who prophesied for him a career of glory.

CHAPTER VI.

THE Tories wasted days and almost weeks in getting their Cabinet formed and all the posts properly filled—properly filled, that is so far as party exigencies were concerned, for they had a wonderful knack of putting square pegs into round holes. The Earl of Wigan, one of the ablest statesmen, and one of the best speakers of the time was Premier, and the leader in the Upper House. The Earl had a wonderful influence among his fellows, and in office or out of office, for some years had almost controlled the votes of the peers.

His lieutenant and the leader in the Lower House was Henry Englander, a man as famed in his own way as the Earl of Wigan. Englander was a good speaker and a master of sarcasm. He was wonderfully plausible, and an adept at shuffling out of an inconvenient opinion or

difficulty. He led and his party followed, but there was many a one among the squires who distrusted, not to say disliked, Engländer.

An abler man was the Viscount Wyre, eldest son of the Earl of Wigan, who possessed a seat in the Commons, and, who being some years younger than Engländer, gave up to him the leadership in the Commons.

Much time was lost. Then when the Cabinet was formed, and a Bill relating to taxation was brought in, it met with so much opposition that Engländer withdrew it. A few more days passed, then Easter and the Easter vacation came.

On the resumption of business in Parliament, after the Easter adjournment, Engländer stated that a draft of their proposed new measure on taxation had been rough cast, and that the Bill itself would be quite ready by the following Monday, when he proposed to introduce it. He apologised for asking the House to restrain its impatience three days longer, but trusted that the unexpected defection of two members of the Cabinet, and the embarrassment thereby occasioned to their colleagues, would obtain for him

some consideration, and that even the Opposition—whoever or whatever the Opposition might be—would accord him the grace he asked. Then another hitch occurred, more time was lost, and at last on the Monday fortnight, faithful to his promise, he laid before members the details of the scheme which he had devised to meet the public wants and demands. One of his most attentive auditors was Walter Avondale.

CHAPTER VII.

AVONDALE found not merely the Wharfedale party but the whole House split up into isolated fragments. The Tories, pure and simple, who revered the Earl of Wigan, and, therefore, observed the mandates of his lieutenant, Engländer, as issuing primarily from himself, were the largest and most compact body, and included about one-fifth of the assembly. The other Tories who voted with these, but who had much rather have served under the banner of the Earl of Cotteswold, were not much fewer. For all practical purposes these two sections were one; their views and principles were the same; they differed simply as to choice of leader, though even on this point many of Cotteswold's adherents mistrusted the reality of his Conservatism scarcely less than they disliked Engländer's self-importance.

The Radicals had almost disappeared since the transformation of Sloe from a popular tribune into a staid Minister, but some two dozen of the most determined Radicals still hung together under the guidance of a half-crazy Irishman, a Welsh Dissenting fanatic, and the incomparable Mr. James Muddler. It was a queer set, Romanists, Freethinkers, and Independents, Repealers, Communists, and Protectionists, whose votes could never be relied upon, whose views were not the same a week together.

These marked off, there remained a clear majority of more than one-half. They were Liberals unmistakably, Liberals of various shades of opinion, but who were not either Tories or Republicans ; and they had no leader. It was to this alone that the Earl of Wigan was indebted for his ability to retain office till the close of the Session. Maitland never showed less statesmanship and tact, never put his failings so prominently before men than when, after the downfall of his Cabinet, he obstinately, with a spoilt child's ill humour, refused to take upon himself the direction of the Opposition.

For more than a month the Wharfedale party was in a state of collapse, and it was another month before they were got into order again; and even then full confidence was far from being revived towards the Marquis. During the whole of this period anarchy prevailed throughout the Liberal ranks. Not a few would willingly have followed Rowe, but his opinions on religious matters isolated him from Churchmen generally, and from Sir Edward Pilgrim, FitzHenry, and Williams in particular, and he was, besides, on bad terms with Sir Henry Kerr and others. Then the Marquis of Exmoor and Mr. Jardine were named, but neither was well fitted to take the supreme authority, and both would have refused the offer, while Avondale was ill, and more decidedly so when he was getting better again.

Consequently, on his recovery, our hero had much of his work to do once more. He threw himself into it eagerly, too eagerly, even before his health was re-established, for he sought in active employment a refuge from the saddening and remorseful thoughts that filled his mind. He

had a long interview with the Marquis, who attributed, as far as he could, his anger at the reports that he was leading Wyversley into bad ways, and to an assertion—this was not a pure make up, it came from Killarney—that he (Avondale) had been heard to say the origin and continuance of the Wharfedale party was due entirely to his exertions, and that the Marquis was a mere dummy, and never could be anything better.

“It is all false, and I am bitterly grieved—it has snatched from us the opportunity for power, which will, however, be soon offered us again. But, my young friend, you must excuse my asking you not to go to the Clair Street hell again, nor to allow Wyversley, if you can by any means prevent him.”

Avondale promised he would not do so, though he declared there had been unfair play, and that he had almost determined to find it out.

“Fair or unfair, Avondale, it is all the same—you could never find it out and bring it home.”

And so ended Avondale's visits to Clair Street.

Ravenshurst also apologised to Avondale for

giving credence to the reports, but it need scarcely be said that Avondale did not feel very comfortable at the proffer of regrets and excuses from him, and was well pleased when the interview was over.

We have said our hero went eagerly to work, so much so that the physician cautioned him against over-exertion, and his friends added their expostulations to the same effect. But the more he laboured the stronger he seemed to grow. He spent much of his time at Wharfedale House, writing for and advising with the Marquis, who, entering again with renewed vigour into ambitious schemes, gave a series of parliamentary dinners, as the Marchioness did of receptions, which vied in splendour and magnificence with those of royalty. At these dinners and receptions he was one of the best known figures. Wyversley also had changed much lately. He had shown far greater interest in public matters, and had attended in the Upper House, and voted in several divisions.

The Countess of Wyversley supplemented Lady Wharfedale's receptions by a number of

balls, the invitations to which were carefully arranged for the same political end. These were eagerly sought after, for the *entrée* to her circle was jealously guarded. In addition, the young Earl was a great catch, and for him match-making dowagers laid cunning toils, and ambitious beauties put on their most winning smiles. But though polite to all, he was impregnable to smiles and sighs, and took no more heed of the attractions that were unblushingly offered for sale than does a purchaser whose wants are completely satisfied. His mother was in despair. She deemed that marriage would be a panacea for all his shortcomings, and would perfect the reformation in his habits that had evidently been begun, and she saw the season passing away without his manifesting the least disposition to make choice of a wife.

CHAPTER VIII.

MARY JARDINE had, strange to say, of late, lost much of her sprightliness; she had grown abstracted and melancholy; and, without any apparent cause, her cheeks had become pale, and her health was failing. Her parents were much concerned for her, though she assured them she had no illness. Her sister Alison and Mr. Renshall were married at the beginning of June; and a day or two later Mr. Jardine accepted from Sir Henry Kerr an invitation for her to spend a short time with his family at Wimbledon, to see if the country air would remove her indisposition. Avondale and Wyversley frequently rode down and went for a canter with her and her father over the common. One day Wyversley's horse stumbled and fell, throwing his rider, and shaking him severely, but not dangerously. He was insensible a minute or so, and the scream of

terror that Mary Jardine gave, and her pallor caused her father to have a strong suspicion of the cause of her illness.

From Lady Wyversley's balls, of course, Avondale was seldom absent; and had not the image of Florence Vrynné filled his heart he would have had no difficulty in consoling himself for the perfidy of Miss Dawson. His sister, too, was ever there. She had been presented at Court by Lady Wharfedale. She was one of the beauties of the season, and attracted universal admiration, and probably contributed quite as much as her brother's own polished manners and talents to securing friends and supporters for him. This admiration was occasionally manifested in a manner too pointed not to be embarrassing. The first ball at which she appeared was the night following some escapade of Stanley Carlton's, about which Miss Avondale with some other girls amused herself at that young gentleman's expense. Carlton had been desperately in love with her since the preceding summer. He could restrain his feelings no longer, but that very night, seizing a favourable

opportunity, he poured out to her all that he had so long wished to say. His declaration was very jerky and somewhat disconnected, but it was—what he had never been guilty of before—unfeigned and genuine, and sprang from the heart; and his grief was sincere and unaffected when Miss Avondale, in kind but firm language, rejected his suit.

“Oh, Miss Avondale, do think it over; don’t reject a fellow straight off, wait a year, perhaps you don’t know yourself yet. I will wait gladly for an answer as long as you wish, and do anything you wish, though I can’t be such a great swell as Walter. You are as grand as he is, and I know I am not anything equal to you, but I can and do love you, indeed I do, as truly as if I had the brains of, of, those big swells, I never can remember their names. And I spoke to the governor a long time ago, and I would have spoken to you before, but have been afraid to speak to you before, and he says I can have Sunnilands, close by Worthing, and you said you liked the sea. And I will get into Parliament—indeed I will—or go up to the North Pole to

find out where the Nile is, like Delancourt, and live for six months on bear skins and old boots."

But Miss Avondale, though much grieved at the pain she had caused, could give him no other answer.

A day or two before his sister's marriage, Stuart Jardine, acting on a hint from his mother, who reminded him that faint heart never won fair lady, and that if he did not take care the flower would be gathered before his eyes by some bolder hand, plucked up courage enough to follow Carlton's example. It was in Kensington Gardens, a beautiful calm evening in the early summer, when love was in the rustle of every leaf, in the hum of every insect, in the twitter of every bird. Mrs. Jardine, her husband, and the daughters had gone there for a stroll after an early dinner. Edith Avondale loved him ; he felt it ; his instinct told him so. She had willingly strayed behind with him, and had willingly listened to his words, but she would not give him a favourable reply. She saw that his character needed strengthening, that it had not the manly tone which the heir to

the wealth he would enjoy should have ; and she said—

“I ought not to have listened to you, Stuart ;” she had, at his sister’s solicitations, got into the habit of calling him by his Christian name, but that alone would be sufficient indication for most men, “and I will not listen to you. You have much wealth and many duties ; you do not perform them, you should get into Parliament.”

Next morning Mrs. Jardine called on her and embraced her with the affection a parent shows towards a favourite daughter—

“My darling, I am delighted. Stuart has told me all, and declares he will get a seat at the coming general election in the autumn. He may speak to you again then, may he not, my child ?”

CHAPTER IX.

Two or three days later Ravenshurst came to Granstone Street while Avondale was at dinner. He accepted the latter's invitation to sit down, but seemed very constrained and uneasy. At last he spoke his mind.

“Mr. Avondale, I wish to ask you a great favour, not, however, on my account so much as on that of a lady. The Countess of Wyversley has become greatly disquieted about her son. She believes that, or at least fears that, he is thinking of contracting a marriage which would bring the greatest possible disgrace. You know to whom I refer. I have long been aware—so have others—of his connection with that woman, but I trusted he would break it off in time, and that you would keep him out of serious danger. I fancy you have been to the house occasionally, is it not so? I have, therefore, never mentioned

the matter to the Countess. She has been very anxious he should get married, and has given her balls as much for that reason as for any other ; but Wyversley is, if not averse to, at least unimpressed by the female society of his own rank. Yesterday some one—Lady Barnet, I am inclined to think—told her the whole of this story.”

“And do you suppose Lady Barnet told it simply in order to save Wyversley ? Do you suspect no other person who prompted her ladyship to make such a considerate communication ?”

“I cannot say—not impossible that such should be the case. Has Wyversley any secret enemy ?”

“Many of us have. Captain Dawson is an admirer of the woman you speak of, but she has refused him admittance to the house. He would be glad to get Wyversley out of the way ; he would be still more glad if he could at the same time arouse ill will between the Countess and her son, or between her and the humble individual speaking. You are aware of the relation in which he and I stand to each other. I am, therefore, much disposed to think that he has prompted the Countess’s informant.”

“ Well, however, that may be, Lady Wyversley sent for me last night, and I was of course under the necessity of acquainting her with all I knew. She determined to see the woman, and appeal to her generosity. Rather absurd you may deem such a resolution ; but I did not oppose it, because she had, before I arrived, spoken to Reginald, and prayed and besought him to sever the connection ; but all in vain—he is apparently infatuated. She has done so this morning, and her journey was fruitless—it was but a slight chance. She says this woman is very beautiful and of queenly carriage, and that her drawing room is furnished most tastefully. What do you think of her ?”

“ Don’t ask me. We are often disposed to complain of the arrangements of Providence.”

“ Poor woman ! she deserves our pity then ; but so would Reginald and his mother, and in a still greater degree, if he married her. He must have guessed the Countess’s journey, for on her return he asked the coachman where he had driven her, and the man of course, having no suspicion, told him. Thereupon he ordered his

phaeton to be ready by five o'clock this afternoon. This the Countess learnt by enquiry on seeing him drive off. She is in a sad state—I have left her in tears. She begs me to ask you as a personal favour to follow Wyversley, and to try whether you can effect anything. She is aware it is a task which she could not, save under stern necessity, request you to undertake. But what is to be done? If you can accomplish nothing, then no one can. You have acquired a wonderful influence over Wyversley—he might, perhaps this woman might, yield to you. Of course Lady Wyversley offered her anything in the way of annuity, but she would listen to no terms—plainly told her, in fact, that she loved Reginald, and would not give him up—and, I confess, I fear they will be married before the month is at an end.”

Avondale was truly enough requested to undertake a most disagreeable duty. At last, after much consideration, and with the greatest reluctance, he consented to make the attempt.

Lady Wyversley's visit to Lilybank had been made at about eleven o'clock. Auricoma was in

a light morning dress, which set off her figure to full advantage. She was on the lawn as the carriage drove up, and when its occupant had alighted, she walked into the house after her, greatly wondering who it could be. The Countess was equally astonished at the beauty of the lawn and its flowers, and at the taste manifest in the drawing room, into which she was ushered; and her heart sank within her as she gazed upon the stately loveliness of the person who entered almost immediately. She felt that over her son's fate she had not the slightest control; she understood the fascination under which he had fallen, and she could not frame words to state the object of her interview. An awkward pause, and then she said, simply—

“I am Lady Wyversley.”

Auricoma bowed, trembling slightly—the crisis was come.

Another pause.

“Mother of the young gentleman who frequently visits you.”

Another and longer pause.

“I have come to pray you to discountenance his visits.”

“Discountenance his visits! Why, my lady? Is he not old enough to form his own judgment on such a matter?”

“Yes, but you are older and stronger-minded; you ought to discourage him.”

The Countess made a great slip in thus speaking.

Auricoma flushed at the tone.

“Older and stronger-minded, Lady Wyversley! Do you really think so? Then I mean, if possible, to make good use of those advantages.”

“Oh, I pray you, madam!” exclaimed the Countess. “I spoke rashly. I pray you to give back my son—I pray you—any terms.”

“Terms! Lady Wyversley,” said Auricoma, rising, “you mistake. Think you I should weigh a husband against gold?”

“He is my only son—he cannot tear himself from you, if you do not give him up, and, by a mother’s love, I beseech you.”

“And is not a wife’s devotion as great as a mother’s love?”

“ But he cannot marry you.”

“ Not marry me!—and why not, pray? Does the law offer any obstacle—does society? Who was Lady Shorncliffe? What was the Countess of Haysworth in her early days—that leader of society whose receptions surpass your own? A second rate singer at a small theatre; and, then, Lady Wyversley, what was she before she became a Countess—what was she? Yet society does not refuse her, or others I could name. Does your ladyship ever hear of the Divorce Court? And I have never asked Reginald to marry me—never asked him, Lady Wyversley; but, you know, that many mothers in your rank of life have done so, have stripped their daughters half naked for his and other men’s inspection. You know how old men, greyheaded and debauched, tottering into the grave, buy the finest young women in society for nurses and for—shall I tell you what else, Lady Wyversley? They go amongst them, and examine, and pick, and choose with—would you know what thoughts?—and then they bid for and buy them over the heads of the younger men, who have no

money, and society looks on and approves—approves what? The fact of marriage, you will say; the fact that the seller has sold well, has sold her body for a title, and jewels, and a carriage, and a fortune, instead of for the means of obtaining another day's or week's loathsome existence—the fact that the mother's manoeuvrings and the daughter's *finesse*, have proved successful—so far successful, that a worn-out, toothless *roué* has been cajoled into selecting one fair damsel rather than another to her—to be what, Lady Wyversley, I won't venture to say—and this society approves, and holds the woman up to commendation, provided only she steers clear of the Divorce Court.”

The Countess attempted to close her ears to the cold, cruel tones that pierced through her; she shuddered as she muttered—

“You must be a fiend to speak thus—and Reginald loves you!”

“And I love him, Lady Wyversley, as fondly and devotedly as ever you loved his father”—this was in a much gentler tone. “I love him, and I have shown it. Three years ago I met him first;

he was then going rapidly to ruin, but I could do nothing. Two years this Easter, I met him again, and it was fortunate I did. He had been disappointed; he had got into very bad hands; he was on a bad course. He had been betting and gambling; he was proposing to go regularly on the turf. Who saved him, Lady Wyversley? Who saved him? His mother? His friends? It was I, and you must know it now, if you have not known it before. It was a most difficult task, and nothing but love alone enabled me to do it. His heart was sore; his mind wanted occupation. To withdraw him from the gambling table and race-course, I had to find a greater attraction, and I found it—in love for me. He was deeply involved; and had I not succeeded in weaning him from the crew that had surrounded him, his losses that year would have been £100,000, instead of £20,000, and he would now be pointed at by society as another Brayclift, and the auctioneer would be at Walton House and Wyversley Hall, selling off the bed clothes, everything, even your trinkets. I could easily have got all this money from him for myself, or

the swindlers, from whom you could not save him, would gladly have divided with me the spoil. I began the work of reformation; Mr. Avondale completed it; I filled up the void in his heart, and supplied him with an object to expand his affections upon; Mr. Avondale's acquaintance strengthened his mind, and turned the current of his thoughts to higher aims. And, now, Lady Wyversley, is Reginald the same man he was—say three years since? You know he is not—you know that then the blackleg and the jockey were his associates, from whom he had not energy sufficient to extricate himself, and that now he moves amongst statesmen and ministers as one of themselves; you know what his aims and aspirations then were, and that, within the last month, he has spoken twice in the House of Lords—and who is to be thanked for the change?"

"You," murmured the Countess, almost inaudibly, "but you cannot marry him."

"But I love him," moaned Auricoma, at length giving way to her feelings, and weeping piteously. "I love him, I love him, Lady

Wyversley, and have made him what he is—and I will not give him up—give him up to one of your painted dolls, to a lifeless piece of wax-work, empty-headed, indolent, selfish, who could not appreciate his generous disposition, who would wed him for his wealth and peerage, and would try to bring him down to her own level. I will not give him up! I will not!—I love him!—oh, my God!”

Lady Wyversley, weeping, too, advanced to Auricoma, and kissed her on the cheek.

“ You have done everything for him, and yet you must see that he cannot wed you—it would be the death blow to his future career. I beg you, by the very love you bear him, to give him up.”

“ I will not; I cannot. Why should I? I will make society receive me. Do you think, Lady Wyversley, I should disgrace the head of any man’s table?” she asked, rising up, and throwing her wavy hair back over her shoulders. “ Does my drawing room show any want of taste? And look at me—would your son, would any man, lightly give me up?”

“ You are beautiful !—most beautiful !”

“ Why, then should I resign my husband ? I will not, I repeat it. You ask too much—please go away, Lady Wyversley—you ask too much ; I may quarrel with you—I would not, if I can avoid it. I am very sorry if I have said anything that has offended you. I would not quarrel with you any more than with Reginald—you are his mother. But I will not resign him—I promise that I will not ask him to marry me ; he shall make up his own mind. That is an advantage which no young lady in your circle would give up. She would smile and cry, and pout and entice, and use all her allurements till she had dragged an unwilling declaration from him ; and this society would applaud as a most proper and delicate action.”

CHAPTER X.

SLOWLY and unwillingly Avondale walked up the gravel path at Lilybank, but he quickened his steps as he heard within the house loud voices in angry disputation. He entered the drawing-room hastily. Stansville, Delancourt, Latymer, Bayfield, and two females were there. By the window was Captain Dawson, his forehead contracted, his eyes gleaming savagely, a sneering smile on his lip. He had apparently just arrived, for a riding whip was in his hand ; and his presence was manifestly unwelcome. In the centre of the room was standing Wyversley, his face pale with rage. He was ordering Dawson off, Auricoma holding him by the arm as if to prevent a hand to hand encounter.

“You are a thorough blackguard, sir, and a disgrace to the profession to which you belong. You have, I am persuaded, spread the reports

about Avondale. I willingly believe that there was unfair play and loaded dice, but I believe that you, Captain Dawson, got the advantage from this, and were not, improbably, in league with a whole set of scoundrels. Be off at once; your presence is contamination."

"Gently, my dear Wyversley; gently. Contamination perhaps to an immaculate boy like yourself"—he hissed the words out like so many drops of venom—"but scarcely so to the cherub that is hanging on your arm. Marry her, my dear fellow, marry her; but guard her well afterwards, and keep her out of the way of every friend that has a ten pound note to spare."

Auricoma shrieked at the gross insult; Wyversley rushed on the speaker, but Dawson, a far stouter and more powerful man, felled him to the ground, and then deliberately cut him across the face with his riding whip. Avondale sprang forward to arrest a repetition of this act of cruelty, but fortunately, for he was still weak from his illness, Delancourt was before him, who struck, with giant force, two simultaneous blows, one on the head, the other on the shoulder,

which sent Dawson flying through the window, and rolling down the lawn till he fell in the centre pond. He emerged dripping and stupefied, and walked off, foaming at the mouth, and hurling curses at those in the villa.

Wyversley, half senseless for the moment, sprang to his feet as Dawson went crashing through the glass and woodwork of the window. Those present prevented him following Dawson. Auricoma, too, needed his attention. She possessed strong nerves and a masculine mind; but the insinuation, conveyed in Dawson's speech, had been so abominable, and the taunt so savage and malignant, that she was sobbing hysterically, and her body was quivering as though torn by agonising pains. Her mind had ever been pure compared, not only with those with whom she had associated, but with those whom, at her interview with Lady Wyversley, she had held up to scorn. She had of late secluded herself from all who were acquainted with her past career, and she had indulged the madness of hoping she might be the wife of the young Earl—and thus the hideous sarcasm fell on her with ten-fold

violence. Dawson was a disappointed admirer, an admirer whose advances she had repelled even before she knew Wyversley with a dislike very near akin to loathing, and to whom she had now directed the servants to refuse admission. He it was who had prompted Lady Barnet to give the information to the Countess; he had come to Lilybank to-night thinking that Wyversley certainly would not be there, but having no other defined purpose, save that of seeing Auricoma, and arousing her resentment by a tale of Wyversley's desertion of her. This absurd intention was frustrated by the young nobleman's presence; and he, goaded on by evil passions and by blind animosity, had compressed into the few words he uttered all the malice he was capable of.

Avondale and the others withdrew to the dining room, leaving Wyversley to attempt to assuage Auricoma's misery. In a short period he joined them, saying that she was too unwell to see them again. "Wait, a little while, Walter. You are going my way, and I can give you a lift. Good night, gentlemen." When these had left

the room, he said, "Walter, that scoundrel has killed Auricoma, or nearly so. She is, if not my wife, at least a very dear friend. I must fight him."

"Fight him! Why you must be mad! Fight a duel in England at this time!"

"In England, or out of it, I mean to fight."

"But you know the state of the law, and, besides, this man is a villain—you would have disgraced yourself by fighting such a one half-a-century back."

"I know what the state of the law is, and I trusted you would not, on that account, have hesitated to act as my second. This man has not been proved a villain—therefore I may fight him. He has insulted me doubly—therefore half-a-century back I must have fought him."

"'Tis not for fear of the consequences to myself, Wyversley—I would gladly take your place if it is to be so."

He called back Delancourt, who was walking his horse down the path, and explained matters to him. Both tried to move Wyversley, but in vain. Finally, Avondale said,

“Nothing can be done to-night. I will see you first thing to-morrow morning, and if you still persist in your cooler moments, I will make the necessary arrangements, and Delancourt, no doubt, will act for this man.”

This was agreed to, and Wyversley went off with Avondale and slept that night at his chambers. But when the morning came, the affair was at an end. That night Clair Street was broken into by the police, and several of the frequenters were captured.

Among them was Dawson himself, as well as the proprietor and the attendants. There is little honour among blacklegs, and the proprietor, to get his own penalty mitigated, made a clear breast of the relations between himself and Dawson, which were of a kind so very nearly akin to conspiracy that the magistrate, after fining the other men who were captured, sent these two for trial. Dawson obtained bail and disappeared, was cashiered, and omitted to answer when called on the next sitting of the Central Criminal Court. The proprietor received

six months' imprisonment, and Dawson's recognizances were escheated.

Wyversley himself, the following morning, immediately after hearing from Stansville, who had been one of the unfortunates, an account of the affair, hastened to Lilybank. The servant who saw him said that Auricoma had not left her bedroom, being rather unwell, and that she would not be able to see any one that day. He called next morning about the same hour. A servant handed him, with tears, the following letter :—

“Lilybank, Friday Evening.

“My darling,

“I am going to leave for ever the house where I have spent so many happy hours, and my heart is breaking. I must not see you again, my darling. Your mother came on Wednesday and told me so, I would not believe her, but I must believe that cruel man. Your wife must be one who will not be a reproach to you. Your mother said so, but I thought she was jealous of me or despised me, and I would not listen to her. But she did speak the truth,

my Reginald—yes, my darling, the truth—for society would scorn you, and laugh at you for marrying me. I thought that you could despise society, but you cannot—it was my love which blinded me. I can see clearly now, and my love makes me see even more clearly. All your friends and relations would scorn me, but I should not care; but they would scorn you, too, and that I could not endure, and you might, perhaps, repent of your love and call it infatuation. And then if we had children they would insult them, and hold up their mother's shame to them—yes, darling, you know they would, even those women who, though not driven by necessity, sell themselves body and soul for money and titles, and those viler women who trade on their husbands' shame and credulity, and society applauds them. And how could I live then? Oh, my heart is breaking—pray God I may die soon! I have loved you, Reginald, loved you with a love too great for one human being to give another, and I have clung to you as the drowning man clings to the floating plank. Yet I must give you up—the Countess

said I must, though I said I would not. So I am going away, and you must not search for me, and if you did I should not be here long, for God is good and He will soon take me away. But do you do your duty as a rich nobleman. You have so very much to engage your attention, and you can influence so very many people for good. You have begun to be a great man. Please continue so—I ask it as a last request. My dearest, while I live I shall ever be thinking of you, and praying that you are acting nobly. I have taken but a few things, as otherwise I should not be able to hide myself easily, and so I leave you to do as you like with the rest. I have taken little Fido with me, but poor Reginald I leave for you—he is so big. And I want you to provide for Mary and Ellen. I must not write any more, or I shall not be able to stop at all. This is only a short note, but it is enough to say how dearly I love you, so dearly that I cannot give you up, and that you can never see me again. Good by, my darling, my dearest, my Reginald.

“VIOLET.”

CHAPTER XI.

A FEW sentences will suffice to state what turn affairs took with respect to two or three of the persons concerned herein. The marriage of Killarney and Miss Dawson took place a couple of days before the occurrences narrated in the preceding chapter. It was earlier than originally fixed, and it had been hurried on by both parties; and, in less than a fortnight, the real reason came out—Dawson and Killarney each had been trying to hoodwink the other, and, in a manner, both had succeeded. Mr. Dawson had gone into heavy speculations for the rise in sugar and indigo; a crisis occurred, prices fell rapidly, and, on investigating his affairs a week or two after the marriage, he was a bankrupt—unless his son-in-law could assist him to tide over the crisis.

Killarney's aunt, Miss Dollmore, from whom

he had considerable expectations, had died some two months previously. She was somewhat of a miser, and was reported to be worth, in land and savings, not far off £100,000, and this was not much under the mark. But she left no will, and on investigating her affairs it was discovered—what, doubtless, Killarney had known, if not always, certainly before his marriage—that she was illegitimate. Her wealth, therefore, went to the Crown. Miss Dawson's marriage settlement consisted of her father's promise, which promise was now worth about half-a-crown in the pound. And Killarney's own income was what remained after paying the interest of the incumbrances on a small estate. Miss Dawson was a peeress, whose husband had barely sufficient for his own wants as a bachelor.

Killarney, therefore, was unable, even if he had been willing, to lend any aid to his father-in-law, whose property, including his big house in Lyddonshire, was all sold; and he had once more to recommence life as a commission agent in the city. Killarney and his wife found it necessary to retire to the country in order to

exist on Killarney's limited income, but there the life they led was so disagreeable that Lady Killarney, with her husband's full permission, left him, dropped her title, and returned to her father, and thenceforward took charge of his little household.

CHAPTER XII.

AN hour after receiving Auricoma's letter Wyversley appeared before his mother, looking so ill and wretched, that she was alarmed—

“Reginald, my child, what is the matter?”

For reply, he placed before her the letter. She read it through. The tears rose to her eyes, for the few sentences it contained spoke in trumpet tones to her heart, conveying to her the dying wail of a sister over the hopes and affections that had been blasted in fullest strength. But she did not for a moment forget the stern demands of the class in which she moved, and she said—

“My Reginald, it is better so. She was a true woman—but it is better so. You will soon cease to feel your grief so sharply, and then you will rejoice that you have not married her. You would, indeed, have called your love infatuation.”

“Shall I forget, mother?” he said, in a husky

voice. "Whom shall I marry, and then be rejoiced that I did not marry her? The girl you once recommended me, whose sisters are now in the Divorce Court—Maude Lancelot? You have seen her, mother, she says. Did you tell her that Margaret Glyndour, or Charlotte Fitzroy, would be no reproach to me? Oh mother, mother, she has done so much to rescue me from the turf and from gambling, she had become all to me; and now you have helped to part us. Will you carry out her wishes, and provide for those two servants—they love her. I cannot go to the house again."

He left and went to Granstone Street, and waited till Avondale came in at lunch time.

"I wanted to see you, Walter, but have been afraid you would not be in till this evening. She is gone."

His woe-begone countenance added sufficient explanation. Avondale offered all the consolation he could, but wisely forbore to reason with him. He advised him to run down into the country for a week or two—

"The excitement you have gone through

during the last few days has been quite enough to upset you. Country air, and change of scenery, will invigorate you. You are rather weak just now. Get a little stronger, and then you will be able to consider it calmly. No man must allow his grief to overpower him too much."

This advice Wyversley took. The same evening Avondale gave Mr. Jardine the whole history of the affair, and ventured, now that the liaison was broken off, to remind him of his daughter Mary—

"You cannot, sir, close your eyes to the state of her feelings."

"Perhaps not. But then, according to your own showing, he is desperately in love with this woman. I cannot throw Polly in his way as a counter temptation, and I should be sorry for any man to veer about like a weather-cock from one to another."

"No need for that, my dear sir. If you won't refuse your consent, that is all that is necessary. Wyversley won't veer about; but he must have some female heart to fall back upon. I have

often heard him say so. His nature is, as it were, only half developed. He needs a constant companion and adviser in the shape of a true and loving wife. He is, however, somewhat difficult to please, and I believe that for Mary's company alone has he ever evinced a decided preference: If he has any liking at all for her, the liking would soon, now that he is alone, ripen into love, and, if Mary loves him too, would you deny your sanction?"

Mr. Jardine did not say no; and, therefore, Avondale told his sister, and she, on the first convenient opportunity, hinted to Lady Wharfedale the plot. The Marchioness, a day or two later, mentioned at her next morning's call to Lady Wyversley the secret with which she was entrusted. The Countess, if not exactly overjoyed with the proposed match, saw little objection to it. She was, of course, already acquainted with the Jardines, and she, therefore, determined to make the acquaintance more intimate.

CHAPTER XIII.

ALL the while Avondale was fully occupied, getting together once more the separated members of his group. This was no easy task—they had no confidence in each other and their cohesion, and they distrusted Wharfedale as a leader. But he kept to his task, and, little by little, he got rid of the difficulties. Exmoor had not separated from the Marquis; Jardine and Bransdon soon rejoined him, Kerr and FitzHenry gave their adhesion after some hesitation, and these were followed by the majority of the genuine Liberals.

The Session went on. The Wharfedale party daily grew stronger, and, as they increased in numbers and compactness, the Government became weaker and weaker. No need to detail minutely the course of events—it is written in political history of the time. Finally, the crisis

came. They sustained a defeat on a clear, substantive issue; a defeat which could not be explained away even by Englander's own smooth reasoning and easy principles. So he fell back upon his usual resource—an adjournment till the next Monday.

On the Saturday evening Avondale was at Wharfedale House. Ravenshurst, and one or two more intimate friends of the family, were present, and the conversation turned more particularly upon Wyversley, and they were very glad to hear that there was a chance of Wyversley and Auricoma being separated.

While they were talking a telegram was brought for Ravenshurst. He opened it, read it hastily, and, with a suppressed exclamation, took the Marquis by the arm, drew him a few steps aside, and handed him the telegram. Avondale could not avoid hearing the words, "Accident—serious—this morning—fall—riding." After a hurried conversation, Ravenshurst withdrew, asking the Marquis to make his excuses to the ladies; and, as the others rose to go to the drawing room,

Avondale also retired, pleading that his sister was alone.

The Monday morning came, and spite of many rumours which were flying about, the political question of the hour remained unanswered—what will the Tories do?

Perhaps, but it was only a perhaps, the Premier might dissolve Parliament.

“I don’t think he will,” said the Marquis, to Avondale, at lunch. He had just been perusing one of the “Constitutional’s” productions. It was a choice specimen of abuse. “The party that, favoured by the suddenness of their attack, had carried the adverse vote last week, was an undisciplined rabble, united for the nonce, as thieves can hold together to get plunder, or to resist legal authority, but, for all other purposes, in an utter state of disorganisation. They had no recognised leader. The person, leading them for the time being, directing their movements, we had almost said, directing their wanderings would be a fitter expression—was a gentleman trained in the school of Australian

politics, whose pretensions to office had, it was understood, been cruelly snubbed by Mr. Maitland. What were their principles? They had none—they would be driven to despair if directed to explain their views of Government, and would inevitably fall to blows over the task of dividing the spoil. All would want to be, at least Cabinet Ministers—no lower position would satisfy the ambition of the meanest among them. Is it to hands like these, and to men of this kind that the Premier can venture to resign the sacred charge committed to his trust? Dare he do so? What would be the verdict of posterity on such an action?—what will be the verdict of the country? The whole nation is looking on at the struggle with anxious eyes. To them, to his fellow citizens, his fellow Britons, let the Earl of Wigan appeal before he allows cunning and trickery to accomplish their aims, and win the reward of their villany,” &c., &c.

Poor lady, she was going from bad to worse. Perhaps she was personally unwell, and the pain of internal suffering had augmented the grief with which she was agitated on account of the

impending misfortunes of her country. Perhaps she had imported some scribbler from the New York press ; perhaps—but it is no use speculating.

“Nor do I,” said Avondale, replying to Wharfedale’s observation. “I have read that article—it is rather amusing. But, though it may be inspired, I have come to my conclusion simply from knowledge of Englander’s disposition. I don’t think there will be a dissolution ; the result might, very probably, be unfavourable to the present Cabinet. More likely under pretence that a dissolution, just now, would be very inimical to public interests, they will retain office for the remainder of the Session, and will have a general election in the autumn, and a meeting of Parliament next November to determine the result.”

“Not unlikely ; that has not struck me before. I suppose, in such a case, we must let them have their own way?”

“I suppose so. Indeed, we are not yet ready for office, and shall be all the better prepared, after a few weeks leisure, to make arrangements.”

“Yes; no doubt of it.”

“And you will be the better for a good holiday, Mr. Avondale,” said the Marchioness. “You are looking thoroughly ill again. You have been over working yourself lately.”

“Thank you for your kind observation. I fear I have been doing too much. I was not at all well last night, and Edith would have the doctor in, and he said I must do nothing for some time. I think I shall take his advice, and run away to Scotland before the week is over.”

But it was not work alone which had given him a pale cheek. There was continually gnawing at his heart the remembrance of Florence Vrynné. She was separated from him for ever, and even, if she were not, between him and her would glide the figure of Clare Campion. Avondale was no hardened *roué*, and, consequently, it was not with a feeling of pride that he looked back on those short weeks of passion that had been followed by long months of remorse.

The communication made by Engländer in the House of Commons that evening proved the correctness of Avondale's surmise. The Ministry

would dissolve at once if required, but they would prefer to retain office the rest of the Session, withdrawing the two Bills introduced by them as their stock measures, and discharging the purely routine duties of a Government. In the autumn there should be a general election, and Parliament should reassemble in November.

To this proposal no strong objection was raised, and the House speedily so thinned, that a count-out put an end to the sitting. The chiefs of the Wharfedale party were well satisfied with the arrangements, and they dispersed, after mutual felicitations, to think over their future. Avondale accompanied the Marquis back to Wharfedale House. Both were in the highest spirits. As they entered the Hall a servant said that Lord Ravenshurst was waiting in the library, anxious to see them both.

“Both? Did Lord Ravenshurst ask to see Mr. Avondale as well?” enquired Wharfedale.

“Yes, my lord,” affirmed the man. “Your lordship and Mr. Avondale.”

With a beating heart Walter entered the library. Ravenshurst was looking out of a window.

He turned round, his countenance betraying deep emotion.

“Oh, Wharfedale! she is dead!”

“Dead! You surely cannot mean it.”

“Yes; she died this morning. My poor sister! My only relative! the dearest being I had on earth.”

He turned his face away, for he could not control his grief.

“Ravenshurst, my dear fellow, do not be so cast down. I am most truly grieved—she so young, so beautiful; her death so sudden!”

A long pause ensued. Then Ravenshurst spoke again in hollow tones of deepest dejection and sadness.

“I have something to say to you, Wharfedale, but how shall I tell it? Oh, my God! Wharfedale, the lady that accompanied Mr. Avondale to Waterbridge—part of the way to Waterbridge—was my poor sister! My darling Clare! Her life, I see now, has not been happy. Campion, I knew, was not worthy of her, but I trusted she was content. Words passed at Egremont between her and Mr.

Avondale, and she forgot she was married. That is all, Wharfedale. Please go away, Mr. Avondale. I have told the Marquis what I was obliged to tell. My sister spoke of you once or twice last night. She held you free from blame. She wished you happiness, and that you and I should be friends in future. So we will, if possible—but leave me now.”

CHAPTER XIV.

EIGHT days later Avondale watched, from the little pier at Inversnaid, on the shore of Loch Lomond, the sun set behind the hills on the other side of the lake. The shock of the communication made by Lord Ravenshurst had completely upset him, and during the night he was delirious again. He recovered his senses in the course of the next day, and then the doctor peremptorily ordered him to leave London. After consultation with Mr. Jardine, he determined to make a tour through Scotland. He would have preferred Italy if only to follow the steps of Florence Vryne in the preceding summer, but he was afraid of the long journey. He had come to Stirling, staying there three days, then to Balloch, and was proposing to go up the Caledonian Canal. A letter was awaiting him, when he reached Inversnaid Hotel that afternoon, from his father. It contained un-

expected news—the death of his only known relative, Mrs. Morton, his father's second cousin, the owner of Morton Grange, in South Lyddonshire, who years before had quarrelled with his father, but had always been kindly disposed towards himself, and now dying, had left him Morton Grange, some £3,000 a year.

Avondale and his sister had walked about the grounds of the hotel, and had seen the waterfall that originated Wordsworth's poem "To a Highland Girl."

"These grey rocks, this household lawn,
These trees a veil just half withdrawn,
This fall of water that doth make
A murmur near the silent lake;
This little bay, a quiet road,
That holds in shelter thine abode;
In truth together ye do seem
Like something fashioned in a dream."

They were now sitting on the pier, watching the daylight depart, and feeling the night draw on. It was a lovely time, so very lovely. The air was balmy, soft, soothing to a fevered brow. A blissful quiet, a holy calm was spread around; the insects had ceased to hum; scarcely a leaf dared to move; not a cloud broke the ex-

panse of the sky. To the south-east, over Ben Lomond's towering brow, rose slowly and majestically in all her grandeur the summer full moon, and 'neath her rays glittered the waters of the lake, faintly rippling like a sea of silver.

Walter and Edith were silent, but the thoughts of both were turned to the same subject. All Walter's aims and hopes had been crowned with success. A few short months would see his party in office, and himself with a seat in the Ministry ; was not that happiness enough ? He had marked out for himself a goal ; he had reached it, and the feat had won him cheers, praise, caresses ; what more could he desire ? If anything had been wanting, the letter he had just received would surely complete his measure of satisfaction. Henceforth he could take a position more in accordance with his ancestry and his aspirations.

And yet, filled to the brim as was his cup of success, it was filled with bitterness. Nevertheless his heart was not racked as it had been for weeks and months with contending passions. These had subsided, and had left a dumb, cold

despair overpowering him. He was at peace now, as the volcano is at peace when its fires have burnt out; as the avalanche is at peace when crushed into utter ruin under it lie vineyards and villages, flocks and their owners; as the swollen river is at peace when it overspreads the fruitful plain; as ocean is at peace when from its breast have disappeared the gallant ships that, ere the tornado came, were riding so gaily on it.

He was at peace—so the human heart is at peace when between it and its dearest hopes and its most ardent longings has been fixed a barrier, impassable, immoveable.

He kept musing over the past; over his childhood. He recalled himself and Florence, as boy and girl, constant playmates. Then they were older and bigger, but playmates still, and each vacation, as he returned from Shrewsbury, he hastened over to Brentwood to tell Mr. Vrynné and Florence the history of the half-year. His college career followed. He saw little of Florence. Other thoughts filled his mind; a yearning for distinction expelled every opposing passion. Fame became his guiding star, and the grand idea seized

him—the idea which he had carried out to full fruition. The image of Florence almost faded away, till last Christmas he met her a woman in the full flush of beauty, the wooed of many admirers, and he saw her as though he had never before seen her, and he loved her as men love but once. So he mused, and thought, and pictured to himself the happiness which could never be his, and he groaned in utter misery—

“Oh, Florence, Florence, how I love you! Have you left me? My God, would that the past were a dream!”

His sister hearing him, rose from her seat and kissed him fondly.

“Walter, dear brother, don’t be so sad. Perhaps she has not yet left you; she loved you once.”

He started; he had forgotten where he was.

“Edith, love, I was dreaming. Let us go in, it is getting late. Let us go in; I am so miserable. I shall jump into the lake else, if only to get rest from bitter memories. See how placid it lies.”

“Yes, my brother; but don’t talk so despond-

ing, it makes me, too, feel so unhappy. Yet we ought not to be so. See how beautiful God's works around us are; see the loch glistening as the moon beams fall on it; see those crags on the other side, how grandly and proudly they jut out into the air. Everything is grand and sublime, and everything is at rest, and our souls should be so too. What a dread stillness is amongst these hills. Oh, my brother, let your spirit be calmed; do not despair. We will go in if you wish it; but let us stay a little longer. Would you had told me you loved Florence! I would have prevented this marriage. But, dear Walter, the report may not be true. I have not heard once from her since she left for Naples last March. I will write to her now, or find out through some one."

"No, my sister, you must not. It is certainly true. Your happiness in future must be my source of satisfaction. But let us talk no more about it—let us go in. We rise early to-morrow."

"Let us see the persons in that boat land first—can't you hear them?"

"Yes, and I can just catch the faint sound of

some one singing.”

“It is, I think, a woman’s voice.”

The boat came quickly towards them, two men and a lady in it.

Edith listened acutely. “Walter, it is Florence,” she half shrieked. “It is Florence! and singing ‘Absent, but not forgot.’ Oh, she has not forgotten you. Come and meet them; the landing-place is by that tree.”

But her brother would not move. “I cannot see her—and she is going to be married to another.”

“I will then meet them as they land—we might miss them to-morrow.” She stood on the beach as Mr. Vrynne got out.

“You here, Edith!” he exclaimed in astonishment.

“Yes—so is Walter, on the pier. He is afraid of you, at least of Florence. Oh, Florence, come and speak to him, and you, sir. He has been ill to death, and now is very unwell, and so thoroughly wretched; Mr. Vrynne, he is afraid”—she whispered to prevent the boatman hearing—“is afraid Florence is to be married.”

Mr. Vrynné took his daughter's arm in his—he felt her tremble—and walked to Avondale. “How do you do, Walter? Edith says you have been very ill—I am extremely grieved to hear it.”

Walter could not reply, speech had failed him. Mr. Vrynné turned away with Edith. Florence held out her hand. Walter found words for her, though they were few. “You are not going to be married then?” he said simply.

It seemed but a few seconds before Mr. Vrynné was back again.

“I have taken Edith in, and you had better follow. It is nearly twelve o'clock, and is getting chill.”

CHAPTER XV.

EDITH had told Mr. Vrynné all the political doings of her brother. She did not, however, mention the news which had yesterday reached them from home, thinking that Walter would like to announce that. So next morning, at breakfast, he handed to that gentleman the letter.

“I am extremely delighted—nothing could please me better. Here, Florence, read this note. Indeed there is a paragraph in it which concerns you rather than any one else, but I suppose Walter would object to your seeing it.”

Walter and Edith had purposed ascending Ben Lomond, but the expedition was now put off.

“We can do so to-morrow,” said Walter. “We must get up early and catch the first boat, unless we go down to Rowardennan this evening, and stay the night there; but it is disagreeable changing one’s hotel more than necessary.”

To this they agreed. The forenoon was well advanced before they left the breakfast table, so very much had they to hear of each other. Then they rambled some distance along the cliffs that overhung the lake.

“How very beautiful it is,” said Mr. Vryne, “fully equal to any of the Italian lakes. The only difference is that there are no vineyards coming down to the water’s edge, and that the summits of Ben Voirlich, the Cobbler, and the rest are not white with snow.”

Walter and Florence lingered by themselves. To them the day sped quickly. A year’s wanderings, a life’s hopes each had to pour into the ear of the other.

“Walter, you don’t know how much I suffered last winter.”

“And you don’t know how much I suffered, Florence. I loved you, Florence dear, from the first day I saw you then. You seemed, I cannot say why, to have become altogether a different being to what you were before, and I loved you so ardently, but so hopelessly—I will tell you,

some day, why, darling, but not now. It would only dim our happiness."

"I thought you despised me, Walter. I had loved you ever since you went to College, when I was not at home during the first vacation. I had such strange hopes and longings; I could never banish your image from my mind. Every time Edith mentioned your name in her letter I felt as I had never felt before, and then at last I learnt what it was to love."

"My darling!"

"I saw you the next vacation, but you were just the same; and the next, but you were not the same. You were still like a brother, but you were in love with Miss Dawson."

"Forgive me, dearest—I was utterly blind."

"I repressed my feelings, though it was agony. I smiled, when my heart was torn; and I laughed gaily, and chatted when you were speaking tender words to another."

"Dearest Florence, I will try to repay you with a lifelong devotion."

"Then papa got angry, for he guessed the truth; and he spoke to me, and would have

broken off our intercourse, but I would not allow him, and I never told even Edith, though I used to cry bitterly nearly every evening, for my star of hope was growing dimmer."

"Oh, Florence, don't speak of the past—pray don't. I cannot endure the thought that you cared for me, and that my perversity should have pained you. Forgive me, Florence, forgive me, dearest!"

He was reclining on the heather by her side, holding her hand and covering it with kisses.

"My darling Walter, I have nothing to forgive. I am proud of the pain I suffered." She bent her head and pressed her lips to his cheek. "Walter, you are weeping! You must not—it hurts me so."

"Weeping, love, with regret, and with joy, too."

"Then I went to Italy, with Mrs. Rowcroft, for a whole year. Papa was anxious for me to go, because he hoped I should forget you. I, too, was anxious to go, but not to forget you—oh, no, dearest—but to become more worthy of you, by learning music and painting in their own

native land. I worked very hard, for I trusted to win you back, and I knew how much you admired accomplished women. My masters praised me highly, and my heart was light. You spoke very coldly when you came back from Egremont Towers last Christmas, but I did not heed it much. I shall win you, I repeated to myself, for Edith had told me how Miss Dawson was to be married to Lord Killarney, and we never thought you cared for any one else. But at Lady Popworth's ball, when I had dressed my best, and every one flattered—"

"You looked lovely, darling."

"You were very reserved, and even avoided me, and I felt utterly wretched. But I did not get jealous of Lady Jessie Frescheville, though I grudged every word you gave her. However, there was still the concert at Newbury, and for the whole month I lived upon the hope, and I practised my music so carefully, but when the evening came, and I had exerted myself to the utmost, and longed greedily for one word from you, Walter, you looked on listlessly, while all

the assembly loudly applauded, and I was bitterly disappointed."

Avondale could only press her hand.

"I was mad for the time, and next day, when the horse ran off—"

"Oh, Florence, don't bring back that scene. Those few moments were intense agony. I was mad, too, and only prayed to die with you."

"When the horse ran off I felt no fear or regret, for I forgot papa. And you saved me, Walter, darling, though I had spoken so rudely to you just previously. I can't tell you how overpowering was my joy—I could not have told you then, I could only feel it. But next day you repulsed me when I thanked you, and said all, and more than all, that a woman could say. Papa, too, chanced to be in the next room, and heard our conversation, and he was very angry—and grieved as well, dear."

"I deserved his anger."

"He wished me to marry Sir Arthur Fernie. I put him off for the time. Then almost immediately my health got bad, and the doctor said I

must go to a warmer climate to escape the rest of the winter and the spring winds ; but I wished to die."

" Florence, love, don't speak thus," said Avondale, sobbing heavily.

She kissed him again, and continued—

" We went to Mentone and Nice, and on to Rome. Sir Arthur followed us and plied his suit ; but I would not give him an answer till the close of the year, and you know, dear, what the answer will be. Papa, however, was firm in not permitting me to discountenance his visits—and, indeed, poor fellow, he was very kind and attentive—and in not allowing me to contradict, even to my closest friends, the report of the marriage. Then Easter came, and we heard Mr. Maitland had resigned, but, a day or two later, that the Earl of Wigan, not the Marquis of Wharfedale, was the Premier. We were greatly surprised, for papa had read the debates, till a letter from Sir Charles Popworth said that the reason, so commonly reported, was a quarrel between you and the Marquis, and that you were seriously ill. My hope was utterly gone, till we

had another letter, saying that, after your life was despaired of, you were getting better, and that you were in Parliament. And Alice Popworth wrote to me to say how famous you were, and that she hoped I would alter my mind, and not marry Sir Arthur Fernie. So I knew that your closest friends did not imagine you were in love with any one; and hope came back, and I determined to think it was all a mistake."

"How good you have been, Florence, my love, my dearest."

"I got better and stronger—but I don't look quite so strong as I used; do I, Walter?"

"No, darling, and I have been the cause. Forgive me. But you are so beautiful!"

"I would return to England, and papa consented. We did not go to Brentwood, for I did not wish it. We were at Brighton, and then at Scarborough for a week; I was very unsettled, and papa humoured me. At last we came to Scotland. Papa guessed why I asked him, and hesitated; but I won him over, and we came to Stirling and the Highlands, and to Glenullyn. I wandered all about the hills, wherever Edith

told me you had been last year. I had treasured up her account, and I pictured your picnic on the island, and all the other scenes. I have, too, treasured up—though you don't deserve to hear it—all the notices of you in the papers, the opening of the town hall at Newbury, and what Sir Charles Popworth said—I was so sorry not to be there—your speech in the House, and so on. We staid near Glenullyn a fortnight, and came here three days ago. And, now, my Walter," dropping her voice even lower than the low tone in which she had been speaking, while a bright blush overspread her countenance, "won't you tell me again you love me, much more than you did last evening?"

CHAPTER XVI.

ONE of the passengers by the afternoon boat up the Lake, was the Earl of Wyversley. His face was pale, and showed traces of the grief that had been preying on him.

“Walter, don’t be annoyed at being burdened with a miserable fellow like myself. I have been brooding at Wyversley over—over—you know what; till I could stand it no longer, and, as you said you were going to stay here some days, I have run up in the hope of coming across you.”

“Very glad to see you. A run through Scotland must do you good; the scenery everywhere is grand.”

“It must be if its like what I saw coming up the loch. I hope I shan’t be in the way, as regards your sister, I mean.”

“Not a bit—especially now.”

“Especially now—why not? You have not left her anywhere?”

“No,” replied Avondale, smiling, “here she is, coming.”

He introduced Wyversley to Mr. and Miss Vrynné. The Earl was greatly perplexed, but a few words put matters clear.

“I sincerely congratulate you, Walter,” he said in doleful tones. “I thought you were looking very joyful. But, I fear, your happiness will only render me the more wretched.”

The same evening Avondale resolved, after much hesitation, to lay before Mr. Vrynné the whole history of his connection with Clare Campion. He considered himself as being under a moral obligation to do so. Mr. Vrynné had been as another father to him, and had overlooked and excused conduct which could not but have appeared to a stranger perfectly outrageous—the cause he was bound to explain. The explanation demanded all his nerve and courage. Mr. Vrynné heard him without interruption to the end.

“I am greatly obliged to you for this straightforward avowal, Walter. It has been a difficult task for you to make it, but you have only done

your duty to me. Your conduct last Christmas was simply incomprehensible, and I had, of course, intended to ask for an explanation at the first convenient moment, if you did not previously proffer one. As to yourself and Florence, I won't say more than that my sentiments and wishes have exactly coincided with those in your father's letter. I believed there was some secret lying beneath, but as you never said a word, I was constrained to think differently, and at last thought it best, for Florence's own sake, to break off the intercourse. I have ever looked upon you as thoroughly honourable and manly; otherwise I could not, yesterday, have allowed you to speak to Florence, unless you had first explained to me. I make no observation on what you have related to me, beyond saying that however much you have erred, I cannot deem that you have committed any sin. It is a sad story, a very sad story. You will never forget it. You are not guiltless of folly; a strict moralist might censure you more harshly. But I cannot do so, making allowance for headstrong emotions, and youthful impetuosity. Your remorse and illness

prove your contrition. You have won Florence —be true and faithful to her, be kind to her as I have been, love her as I do; and God bless you both.”

L'ENVOI.

THE whole party staid some days at Inversnaid. They ascended Ben Lomond, and admired the magnificent panorama that is unrolled around its base. They crossed over to Loch Katrine, and visited Helen's Isle and the Trossachs. Thence they returned and went along the West Coast to Skye. Then back to Oban, and up the Caledonian Canal, climbing Ben Nevis on the way. On to Inverness and Colloden, to Dunkeld and its Cathedral, to Killiecrankie and Perth. Mr. Avondale had overtaken them at Inverness, and Stuart Jardine meeting them at Perth compelled them to take up their abode at Glenullyn till his father, who was remaining in London a week longer, should come down.

Wyversley never referred, even when alone with Avondale, to Auricoma, but his thoughts were often with her. He had, however, got over

the sharpness of his grief, and Avondale trusted that with the progress of time, and by help of active occupation, he would remember her but as a dream.

Avondale, himself, had before him a new and undimmed future. His days were one continued round of happiness, genuine, unalloyed, intoxicating ; for

“ Love took up the glass of time, and turned it with his glowing hands ;
Every moment lightly shaken, ran itself in golden sands.”

THE END.



